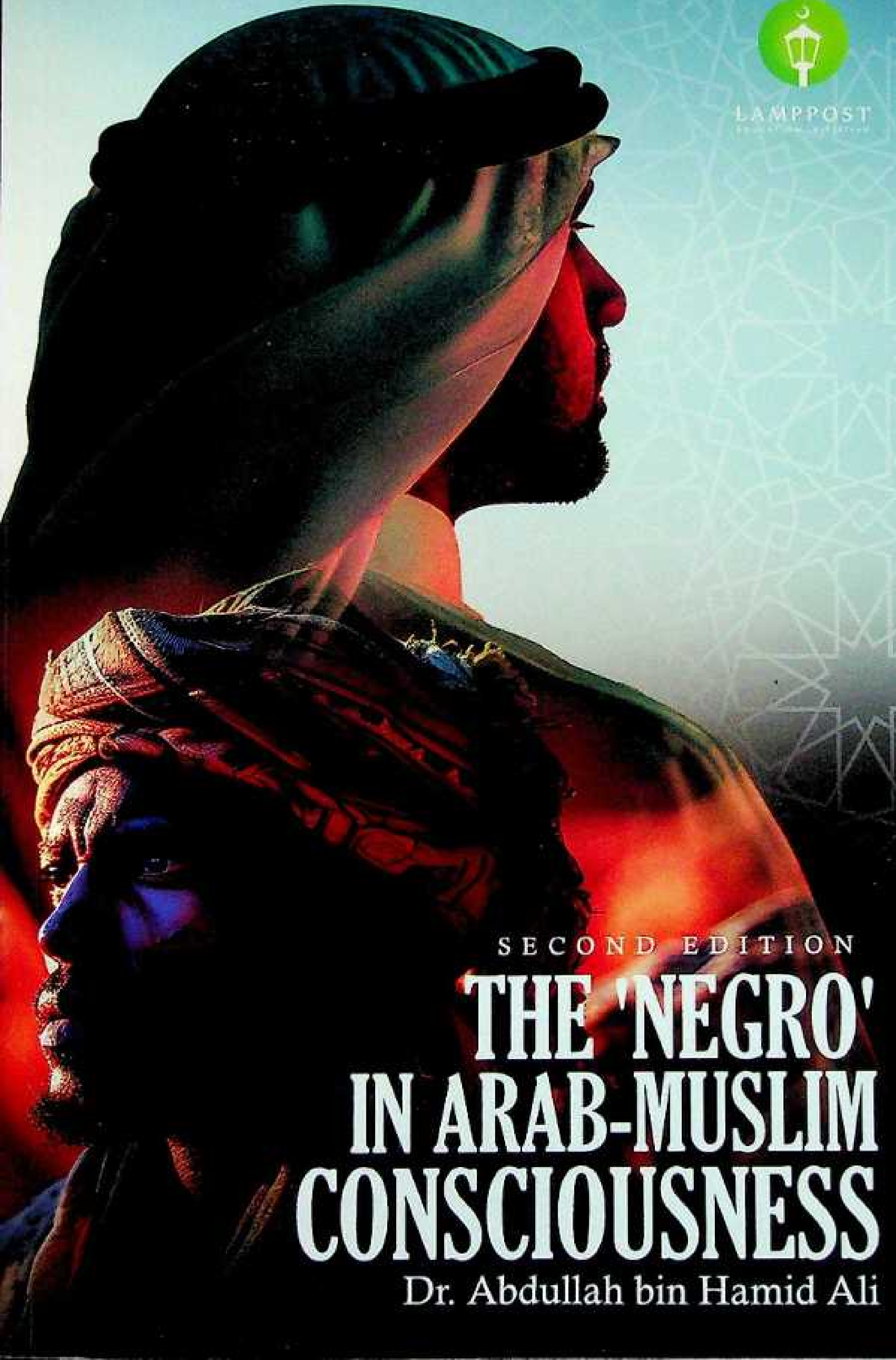

LAMPPOST

SECOND EDITION

THE 'NEGRO' IN ARAB-MUSLIM CONSCIOUSNESS

Dr. Abdullah bin Hamid Ali

THE 'NEGRO' IN ARAB-MUSLIM CONSCIOUSNESS

Dr. Abdullah bin Hamid Ali

What is the 'negro'? Who qualifies? What is its Arabic equivalent? And, what did pre-modern writers mean by it?

There is a common belief that the 'negro' refers to any "black" person of sub-Saharan African heritage. Historians, however, often differentiate between the Moor, the Nubian, the Ethiopian, the Kushite, and the Negro. Why this distinction if all "black" Africans and those of African heritage presumably belong to a common pedigree?

This book's author, Dr. Abdullah bin Hamid Ali, argues that the 'Negro' or 'Zanj' as perceived by premodern Arab historians, theologians, and jurists was not only a geographical population. It was also one perceived to be culturally inferior to all other known 'races.' For Arab climatic theorists like Al-Mas'udi and Ibn Khaldun, this phenomenon could easily be explained by the fact that the 'Negroes' (al-Zunuj) lived at the extreme southern regions of the Earth which brought with it a lack of industriousness and urbanisation ('umran) similar to what one might find as he/she travels closer to civilisation's center, the Mediterranean.

A particular aim of this work is to underscore how racial conceptions and perceptions can and have influenced aesthetic standards, social inclusion, and legal norms. The work also demands that its reader reconsider any preset ideas about reified races, which contributes to confusion about the dynamics of race and racism in current times.

LAMPPOST
EDUCATION INITIATIVE

ISBN 9798341305311
90000
9 798341 305311

The "Negro" in Arab Muslim Consciousness

ABDULLAH BIN HAMID ALI

LAMPPOST
EDUCATION INITIATIVE

LAMPPOST EDUCATION INITIATIVE
PO Box 162117, Atlanta, GA 30321 (USA)

Copyright ©2024
Lamppost Education Initiative
All rights reserved.

Lamppost Education Initiative, http://www.lamppostedu.org

First published by CLARITAS BOOKS © December 2018
Bernard Street, Swansea, United Kingdom
Milpitas, California, United States

Aside from fair use, meaning a few pages or less for non-profit educational purposes, review, or scholarly citation, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

ISBN 9798341305311

Cover Design: Adriane Hall
Typesetting: Imran Rahim

Funded by a grant from The Foundation for Islamic Scholarship & Teaching (FIST)

For you,
Mom and Dad.
Rest in peace.

Abdullah bin Hamid Ali is associate professor of Islamic Law and Prophetic Tradition at Zaytuna College and the Founding Director of the Lamppost Education Initiative. He completed a BA (*Ijāzah 'Ulyā*) in Shariah from the University of Al-Qarawiyyīn in 2001, an MA in Ethics & Social Theory in 2012, and a PhD in Cultural and Historical Studies in Religion in 2016, both from The Graduate Theological Union. At Zaytuna he heads the Honors Program and teaches multiple courses including Family Law, Inheritance Law, Commercial Law, Uṣūl Al-Fiqh, and Islamic Virtue Ethics (*Mabādi' al-Taṣawwuf*). He served as fulltime Muslim chaplain at the State Correctional Institute of Chester, PA from 2002-2007.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must firstly thank the Creator for the gifts of life, faith, and the privilege of being raised by parents committed to justice and racial equality at a most volatile time in American history. My sincere gratitude goes to Dr. Munir Jiwa, who has given me extremely useful advice and direction throughout my studies at the Graduate Theological Union during the pursuit of both my MA thesis and PhD dissertation. I would also like to express gratitude to Professor Judith Berling who helped me struggle through formulating my dissertation thesis and served as an indispensable evaluator of my research and writing. Thanks also goes to Dr. Hatem Bazian of UC Berkeley for his important contributions to the improvement of my dissertation as well as the constructive feedback and suggestions of Dr. Sherman Jackson of the University of Southern California. Thanks to Dr. Khalid Blankinship from whom I learned the basic tools of scholarship, to Shaykh Anwar Muhaimin, Ustadh Anas Muhaimin, and their late father, Shaykh Nafea Muhaimin—God's mercy upon him, for accommodating and nurturing the potential they saw, more than two decades ago, in this young seeker unable to afford the cost of class. I extend a word of immense gratitude also to my teachers and elders in Morocco, especially Dr. Abdullah Ghaziwi, who humbly worked to find me physical and spiritual shelter while instructing me in the Islamic sciences, to Shaykh Muhammad al-Ta'wil, the former mufti of Fez—God expand his estate in Paradise, who guided me in the study of Islamic legal texts in the Al-Qarawiyyin Mosque and in his living room. A special thanks to Shareef Hasan Al-Banna and Claritas Books for publishing the first edition of this book as well as other works of mine. And without the moral and financial support of Pervez Qureshi and his Foundation for Islamic Scholarship and Teaching, this and similar projects of the Lamppost Education Initiative would not be possible. I dedicate this book to my parents, Hamid Mahmud Ali and Majidah Mattie Ali, who, unfortunately, are not here to celebrate my accomplishments. I know they

would have been proud. Finally, I thank my beautiful wife, Siham Boudkik, who has been very patient with me throughout our marriage and education, and whose piety and discipline inspires and deepens my love for her every day. I do not know where I would be without you in my life. And to my children, Maryam Safia and Mohamed Tahir, who deserve so much more of my attention. Thank you for bringing me so much joy. I pray that this book will help you gain a better understanding of who you are.

The "Negro" in Arab Muslim Consciousness

DR. ABDULLAH ALI

Several prophetic traditions and legal teachings disparage and discriminate against black Africans. But why did that not dissuade Africans from converting to Islam? What about Islam and/or African cultures prevented them from feeling alienated from the religion? *The "Negro" in Arab Muslim Consciousness* asserts a strong connection between the spread of color-based racial taxonomies and European colonialism despite the perennial nature of dark skin antipathy. Many ancient writers have caricatured the equatorial and sub-Saharan Bantu-speaking cannibalistic black as the prototypical "savage." From this caricature, the concept of the "Negro" was born. That shared culture rather than color was paramount to premodern conceptions of race, likely, abated general African disapprobation of black skin disparagement, which sometimes manifested itself in Muslim society and Islamic literature.

Table of Contents

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION 3

PROLOGUE 9

INTRODUCTION 25

Guiding Questions

What is special?

CHAPTER 1 39

Blackness as Perennial Other: Transhistorical Anti-Black Sentiment

What is an Arab? 41

Who Did Arabs Consider "White"? 46

How Arabs Became White 50

The Prophet's Complexion 52

Theorizing the "Negro" 56

Conclusion 57

CHAPTER 2 59

The Maliki School and Race

Maybe "Black" Isn't Beautiful After All 74

CHAPTER 3 79

Perceiving "Black" Through Arab Eyes

Did Prophet Muhammad Have Anything to Say About Blacks? 82

Were the Prophet's Companions Racists? 90

Is Racism Part of the Islamic Legacy? 94

Conclusion 99

CHAPTER 4 105

The Connection between Blackness and Slavehood

CHAPTER 5 117

Slavery: From Africa to Arabia
Why Was There No Islamic Emancipation Proclamation? 122
CHAPTER 6 129
Race, Pre & Post Enlightenment
Racism in the Modern World 135
CHAPTER 7 145
Master Racism in Judeo-Christian and Islamic Contexts
CHAPTER 8 159
Race Taxonomies: Human Uses and Abuses of Classification
APPENDIX I 169
Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1448) on the Prophet Muhammad's Color
APPENDIX II 173
The Whitening of the Arabs of the ʿAbbāsid Caliphate (750-1258 CE)
APPENDIX III 177
Mālikī School of Law
BIBLIOGRAPHY 185
INDEX 193

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

My interest in this research was sparked by conversations. A friend serving as an Imam in a Connecticut mosque in the early 2000's sought my religious counsel; A North African Arab man was demanding that his Black American wife share the family's expenses with him. We found the request strange since men from his country, typically, cover all such family expenses even if though they exceed the demands of the Islamic law. On another occasion, one of my students told me of an Arab man from a similar North African country taking refuge in the Mālikī School to justify a claim he made to a Black woman he had proposed to. Her father disapproved of the marriage. But the woman, no longer in her 20's, was eager to start a family and was hurt by her father's objections. The prospective spouse assured her that her father's approval was unnecessary since "Black women" are given greater freedom in their selection of marriage guardians in the Mālikī School. Consequently, any man willing to act as her guardian, even if there was no blood tie between him and her, may legitimately do so. Both North Africans were in the process of applying for American citizenship. And in both cases, I was led down a rabbit hole of legal investigation and discovery. Does the Mālikī School really loosen the marriage protections for Black women? Or are these the cases of racial disdain and objectification they appear to be? Why did I not recall covering this topic during my studies in Morocco? But even if the Mālikī School was being misappropriated for selfish purposes, what really does the school say about this topic? Why would such a distinction exist, if any? And how did Black African Mālikīs miss this ostensibly anti-Black policy?

Intrigued by the topic, my interest in and detection of anti-black sentiment in the larger Islamic scholarly tradition was peeked. This led me to delve deeper into reports and statements I had earlier brushed off as exceptional to test that hypothesis more. And in the process, I uncovered more troubling information. My formal investigation begun with my MA thesis entitled *Islam, Race & the Maliki School: Racialized Thinking in Islamic Theological Reflection*. Some years later in fulfillment of my PhD dissertation, I wrote *The Negro in Afro-Arabian Muslim Consciousness* which included deeper research into the broader Islamic tradition and reflections on theories of race. Prior to my book's publication, I changed the title to *The Negro in Arab Muslim Consciousness* since the bulk of the discussion concerned Arab reflections on blackness outside the Mālikī School and Africa. The current book is the culmination of that research.

It is not the aim of this book to demonize Arabs but to showcase the many issues which complicate race relations and dark skin antipathy more generally. We live in a time of great upheaval considering the culture wars brewing in Western nations, attempts to export the sentiments which fuel those wars, and the resistance of other nations to their importation. In the US, in particular, a racial bifurcation has erupted in the public consciousness and reinforced by certain political pundits which pits "Whites" against non-Whites who are now collectivized as "People of Color." Whites—especially conservative heterosexual Christians—are treated as default "oppressors" while "People of Color" are the *de facto* "oppressed." No real conversation or debate seems possible at times. And while there are seldom passing acknowledgements of the cultural constructivist contribution to racial conceptions and perceptions, the current racial scheme is often treated in socially and biologically deterministic terms.

Even more fateful is that many Muslims living in Western countries have appropriated the negative racial assumptions of Critical Race Theory and alienating language of "white fragility," "antiracism," "diversity," "equity," "inclusion," and "intersectionality" as promoted by authors like Robin DiAngelo and Ibram X. Kendi. Rather than employing Islam's more congenial language and unifying view of humanity, Muslims have descended into low culture conversations subordinating their interests and those of humanity overall to those of people who wish to promote racial prejudice to destroy societal harmony under the delusion that it will ultimately create a more just world.

A proper understanding of the history of race, its complexities, and disparate treatment in different contexts has the potential to heal the current malaise. That is, at least, my conviction. As a Muslim, I believe all people to be the progeny of one man and one woman who we lovingly refer to as Adam and Eve—upon them God's blessing and peace. I believe every man and woman is redeemable and that humanity's only permanent enemy is Satan. While a full explanation for the evolution of our colors and phenotypes remain clouded in mystery, our differences serve as a test, a blessing, and a sign of God's unicity.

Racial difference tests the more socially preferred races to treat the less preferred with fairness and to show proper gratitude for this accidental worldly advantage. It tests the less preferred races to exhibit resilience in the face of exclusion and to also be appreciative of their advantages over races even less preferred than themselves. Racial difference is a blessing in that it provides variety to the human species, multiple mating options, and opportunities to acquire the science and culture of outsiders. Despite human biological variation, certain shared essential qualities point to one original designer whose insignia is inscribed on every creature. As there are different galaxies, solar systems, planets, moons, bodies of water, land masses, animal species, and microscopic organisms which all share in essential elements, so does the human being. That diversity, paradoxically, is one of the greatest signs of God's uniqueness and oneness.

This second edition of *The Negro in Arab Muslim Consciousness* differs from the first in the following ways: (1) I have attempted to refine the book's language through both simplification and sophistication. That includes adopting the American English spelling of words as opposed to the English of the UK (e.g. "color" as opposed to "colour"); (2) Death dates of Muslim personalities are listed as Hijri/Gregorian (e.g. 179/795) while for non-Muslims only the Gregorian dates are mentioned (e.g. 1895-1950 or death of date e.g. 1877); (3) I have added this preface and the subsequent prologue. The latter was an epilogue in the first edition; (4) Unlike the first edition, I have made "The Maliki School and Race" a main chapter of the book bringing the number of chapters to eight instead of seven. In the first edition, the chapter was merely an appendix; (5) the removal of repeated citations and quotes; (6) what were previously endnotes are now footnotes. The original plan in the Claritas Books edition was for the book to be for popular consumption. Accordingly, footnotes were formatted into endnotes so as not to distract readers from the main text. But as many of those who support our efforts at Lamppost Education Initiative tend to be more academically inclined, we decided to restore the footnotes to their proper places. There are several useful comments and references to be found there. So, I hope readers will appreciate this decision; (7) We have added the following transliteration key to help readers of Arabic to know what special letters are being used in the original.

A Note on Transliteration

Another point of note is that this edition follows a standard Arabic transliteration style with few exceptions. Unlike the first edition, every feminine noun ending in a tied tā' (ة) now ends in the letter 'h.' Previously, such words ended in an 'a' as in '*Muqaddima*' which is now '*Muqaddimah*.' I have also tried to consistently use the definite article (*Al*) before the name of every important personality. So, Suyūṭī, Ṭabarī, Sakhāwī, Jāḥiẓ have become Al-Suyūṭī, Al-Ṭabarī, Al-Sakhāwī, and Al-Jāḥiẓ for example. Where I depart from standard practice is when I use words which have become common in English use. So, names like Allah, Muhammad, Ahmad, Ali and words like Hadith, Sunnah, and Khaldun (from Ibn Khaldun) are not accented even when paired with non-Anglicized Arabic words or as part of a citation.

TRANSLITERATION KEY FOR SPECIAL CHARACTERS

إ أ ء		’	(To indicate a slight catch in the breath. Also to signify that *hamzah* has been dropped from the beginning or the end of a word)
ت	T	t	
ث	Th	th	(Pronounced like *th* in the word *think*)
ح	Ḥ	ḥ	(A tensely breathed *h* sound originating from the middle of the throat)
خ	Kh	kh	(Pronounced like the Scottish *ch* in *loch* with hollowed mouth to produced full sound)
د	D	d	
ذ	Dh	dh	(Pronounced like *th* in the word *this*)
ر	R	r	(Pronounced like Spanish *r* with a roll of the tongue)
ز	Z	z	
س	S	s	
ش	Sh	sh	(Pronounced like *sh* in *shoe*)
ص	Ṣ	ṣ	(A heavy *s* sound pronounced from the far back of a hollowed mouth to produce a full sound)
ض	Ḍ	ḍ	(Pronounced from far back in the mouth to produce hollowed sound. Corresponds to a heavy *d/dh* with gentle bite on one of both sides of tongue)
ط	Ṭ	ṭ	(Heavy *t* sound pronounced with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound)

ظ	Ẓ	ẓ	(Heavy *z* or *th* as in the word *this* pronounced with a hollowed mouth to produce full sound)
ع		ʿ, ʿa, ʿi, ʿu	(Pronounced from mid-throat. A swift and slight interruption of air or strain in one's throat is needed for proper pronunciation)
غ	Gh	gh	(Pronounced like a throaty French *r* with hollow mouth to produce full sound)
ق	Q	q	(A guttural *q* sound with the mouth hollowed to produce full sound)
ك	K	k	
ه	H	h	
و	W	w	
أَي	Ay	ay	(Composite *ay* sound as in the word *play*)
آ	Ā	ā	(extended *a* sound as in the word *cat*)
◌ِي	Ī	ī	(elongated *i* sound as in the word *ski*)
◌ُو	Ū	ū	(elongated *u* sound as in the word *blue*)

PROLOGUE

An Important Note on Blackness and Race

There is no greater misfortune that a person can suffer than dehumanization as it is a precursor to murder. And the black African has undoubtedly suffered this fate much more consistently than any other race of people on the planet. Antipathy towards blacks neither started with the Middle Passage nor originated among the Europeans. Rather, it is a phenomenon that predates practically all modern societies. Prior to the commencement of Muhammad's prophetic mission, the black African had already been a familiar sight in Arabian society as freemen, merchants, and as slaves. Many of the sources available to us portray a considerable number of Africans living amongst the Arabs as slaves, but that fact is insufficient reason to equate their plight in Arabian society with the experience of those brought to the shores of America during the Middle Passage. Their presence in Arabia was largely due to a long history of interaction, conflict, and interrelation between inhabitants of the peninsula and the African continent which led to an integration of blood, and the coincidental birth of the Arab people. Both the 'Adnānī and Qaḥṭānī stocks of the Arab peoples, according to early Muslim sources, form from dark roots and can be traced to the African continent. Hager, the mother of Ishmael, was herself African, after all, as alluded to by the ancient historian, Ibn Hishām. The Banū Jurham of southern Arabia into whom Ishmael married, likewise, were a people predominated by dark complexion.

Most Arabs of the prophetic period would qualify as "black" under certain modern taxonomies considering their complexion (light and dark brown), as attested to by experts. But as centuries passed in the face of incessant efforts of conquest, the whitening of the Arabs was achieved until somatic norms were transformed and apprehended in a different light. This resulted in an ideational shift in social stigmata, like the notion that ascribing "whiteness" to a person's skin color meant that one suffered from an ailment which fundamentally constituted an imperfection (vitiligo). At this time, bad omens were associated with "blackness" only in metaphorical terms. Through this process of "whitening", the metaphorical would also become the literal for both "White" and "Black." Consequently, white skin would be held to be an objective standard for beauty; a trend that led to legal deliberations in North African centers of the Mālikī School over whether distinctions should be made in the law between the marital rights of "noble" and "ignoble" women or not. Through this decision, "Black" women, especially African—and other "unattractive" non-Arab women—would be relegated to "second" class or "undesirable" status, thereafter, encountering greater agency and prerogative to choose whatever men they pleased to execute their marriage agreements. This "right" —while laudable to a modern liberal mind—actually left Black and similarly classified non-Arab women more vulnerable to the ravages of men potentially seeking to exploit them. "Noble women," on the other hand, remained "guarded" and "protected" by a system that paradoxically prided itself on protecting the vulnerable from the abuses of the privileged and strong. The aesthetic bias did not merely stop with the ideals that men set for women. On the contrary, the judgments about superior beauty even applied to judgments made about men.

Before "black" became beautiful in the United States of America, a term commonly used to refer to those of African descent was the word, "Negro." Although many black civil rights champions were averse to its use due to its negative connotations among "Whites", others made common use of it. Considering the negative history and the savagery of European treatment of "Blacks", it is difficult for any Black victim or survivor to read "black" in the Islamic sources without conjuring up the image of an African face. This apprehension along with widely held perceptions of blackness often complicate attempts to read the comments of Arab writers about Blacks without essentialising or excluding certain members from the writers' periphery.

'Abd Al-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldun (808/1406), the 15th century Tunisian Mālikī historian, sociologist, and economist, most famous for his *Prolegomena (Al-Muqaddimah)* on historiography and sociology, has been both celebrated and rebuked. According to his sociological theories there is an inseparable connection between environmental factors, like climate, and the behavior of various people on the planet. Comments of his are often understood to be universally disparaging of black people, a thing which has led several contemporary blacks, even Muslims, to dub him a racist. Of certain African tribes, he had the following to say:

> ...and south of this Nile there are a people among the blacks called *Limlim* who happen to be unbelievers. They brand their faces and temples. The people of Ghana and Takrūr invade them, take them as captives, sell them to merchants, and take them to the *Maghrib*. Nearly all of them are slaves, and there exists no civilization beyond them to the south except for peoples who are more akin to inarticulate animals than those who are articulate. They reside in open deserts, caves, eat grass, and unprepared seeds, and some are cannibals who are not to be counted among humans.[1]

"...[P]eoples who are more akin to articulate animals than those who are articulate" and "are not to be counted among humans" happen to be the most unpleasant of these remarks. Because these particular people are understood to have been black, much outrage has been directed against Ibn Khaldun. A closer look, however, reveals that there is little in his words that justifies a conclusion which universalizes these sentiments to all blacks. Rather, what is particularly unattractive to Ibn Khaldun are the people's "unbelief", lack of civility, and "cannibalism." The matter would differ greatly if Ibn Khaldun made their black skin their fundamental flaw. But any such reading fails to justifiably warrant incrimination. If anything is worth underscoring, it is his clear distinction between unrefined communities and those of Ghana and Takrūr who captured, enslaved, and sold *Limlim* captives. Ibn Khaldun's concern is less with groundless judgments made about the relative morality of people than it is about explaining how environment, climate, and geography contribute to the degree of civilizational progress or lack thereof. For these reasons, Sherman Jackson says in his defense,

> According to Ibn Khaldun's theory, the further removed a people were from the moderate climate of the Mediterranean, the less intelligence and civilizing potential they would have. Thus, the same savage status he imputes to Africans furthest removed to the south is imputed to whites "(Slavs *Saqalibah*)," who are furthest removed to the north...

---

[1] 'Abd Al-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldun. *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldun*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1993, p. 43.

What Jackson is referring to is the following statement of Ibn Khaldun,

> ...As for the regions that are far removed from the [earth's] center...their inhabitants are more distant than those of the central regions in every way. For instance, their buildings are made of mud and reeds. Their staples are of corn and herbage. Their attire is of the leaves of trees and hides they wrap around themselves. Most of them lack clothing, and the fruits and condiments of their lands are of an odd nature seemingly perverted. They do not transact wealth with the two precious stones (gold and silver). Rather, they transact with things like copper, iron, or with hides they utilize to appraise things related to their interpersonal business exchanges. In addition, their behavior is close to that of the inarticulate animals, so much so that it is related about many of the blacks from the first region [I have spoken about] that they live in caves and jungles, eat herbage, and that they are uncivilized and unsociable cannibals as is the case among the Slavs (*Saqaliba*). The reason for this is their remoteness from the [moderate] central region...[2]

That Ibn Khaldun's concerns were less bigoted than typically understood is best demonstrated when he says elsewhere,

> Al-Mas'ūdī dealt with the study of the reason for lightheadedness among the blacks as well as their frivolity and excessive merriment; and he attempted to explain it without doing anything more than conveying from Galen and Ya'qūb b. Isḥāq al-Kindī that it is due to the weakness of their brains and the resulting weakness in their intellects.

He then concludes defensively, "These words are pointless and void of any [empirical] evidence." And "God guides whomever He pleases to a path that is straight."[3] Jackson says, "Race, in other words, was just not Ibn Khaldun's thing. And one must ask why the history of race relations in America must serve as the only prism through which his statements can be understood."[4]

But, what then of these sub-Saharan peoples about whom several Arab historians speak negatively? Who are they if, indeed, one is convinced that

---

[2] 'Abd Al-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldun. *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldun*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1993, p. 66.

[3] 'Abd Al-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldun. *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldun*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1993, p. 66.

[4] Sherman A. Jackson. *Islam & the Black American*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 105.

Arab attacks on blacks were *not* directed against all "colored" peoples? There is strong evidence that they were references to the Bantu speaking people of sub-Sahara known as the Zanj. English-Arabic dictionaries seem unanimous in their translation of the word, 'Zanj', as 'Negro.' According to medieval Arabic sources, the Zanj people had a history of conflict with other blacks living north of them, the latter whose relationship with Arabs was in many regards more amicable, as one history written in 372 AH/982 CE by an unknown author entitled, *Hudūd al-*'Ālam (Limits of the World) states. According to the author, "The people of the areas of the south, all of them are black due to the hotness of the climate. And most of them are nude. Gold is found in their lands and towns. And they are remote from the point of human equilibrium (*ḥadd i'tidāl al-bashar*)." The first group of people the author showcases after these introductory words are the *Zanj* people about whom he says, "Its inhabitants have broad faces, large physiques, and kinky hair. Their natures are as that of untamed animals, and they have intensely black skin. There is enmity between them and between the people of Abyssinia and of Zābij."[5]

Interestingly, the author when speaking of the Zābij people who live to the northeast of the Zanj and the Abyssinians who live west of them does not characterize either of the two peoples as "untamed animals" as he does when describing the Zanj. It also seems that as one travels farther north, civilization grows, especially, the more one encounters Muslims. Take for example the fact that the Zābij people are "half-nude" instead of completely nude as was the case with the Zanj people. There are also "some Muslims and merchants" in Zābij but no mention of that in the lands of the Zanj. The Abyssinians, likewise, are described as people who are "distinguished by their well-proportioned faces." And they are "blacks who are peace-loving and have high zeal." The Abyssinians enjoyed regular trade relations with Oman, the Hejaz, and Bahrain as well.[6] And it is, perhaps, because of these considerations that the authors of most laudatory works on blacks have far much more to say about the people of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) than they do about the Zanj.

Compare this with the comments of the earlier traveler, chronicler, and historian, Ali b. al-Ḥusayn al-Mas'*ūdī* (342 AH/953 CE) who says of the Zanj, "There are some among them who have sharp teeth and eat one another."[7] Read together with Ibn Khaldun's sub-Saharan cannibals, a facile

---

5 Unknown Author (Yūsuf al-Hādi Edition). *Ḥudūd al-'Ālam min al-Sharq ilā al-Gharb*, Cairo: Al-Dār Al-Thaqāfiyyah li al-Nashr, 1999, p. 145

6 Unknown Author (Yūsuf al-Hādi Edition). *Ḥudūd al-'Ālam min al-Sharq ilā al-Gharb*, Cairo: Al-Dār Al-Thaqāfiyyah li al-Nashr, 1999, p. 146

7 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Al-Mas'ūdī. *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma'ādin al-Jawhar*, Beirut:

connection can be made between them and the Zanj people. This characteristic along with their lack of clothing make it far easier to caricature or stereotype the Zanj as a savage race.

When reading words intended to deride "Blacks" or to degrade their humanity one must pay careful attention to the exact words of each writer about blackness. Race is a very elusive concept which often takes centuries to crystallize through negotiation and imposition. We must be very careful not to conflate modern conceptions of race and color and project them onto pre-modern and medieval civilizations, even though there is some degree of overlap.

Scientific Racism & the Origin of Contemporary Race Perceptions

The 18th century German physiologist, physician, and anthropologist, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840), is credited with introducing one of the most influential of all racial taxonomies. Blumenbach's theories about race—which included the invention of the term 'Caucasian', a quinquepartite taxonomy of race,[8] and the employment of the new pseudo-science called "craniometry'—set the stage for several 19th century naturalists to promote what some have termed "racial anthropology." Perhaps, the most prominent of those naturalists was the French diplomat, Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882), author of *The Inequality of Human Races,* who argued for the natural superiority of the "Aryan" and other "White" races. "Racial anthropology" or "scientific racism" is a pseudo-science which theorizes racial hierarchy among the peoples of the world in light of discoveries related closely to the sizes, shapes, and angles between related parts of human skulls. Believing that they had discovered an objective standard for judging the natural merits and gifts of people, Blumenbach and others thereafter reasoned that Europeans, especially the Georgian stock, possessed superior beauty. These theories later accommodated neocolonialist sentiments during the period of New Imperialism (c. 1880-1914); justifying European racial superiority thereby facilitating the colonization of the darker peoples of the world. Though it can be argued that Blumenbach's original intent was not to aid the imperial mandate for conquest and colonization, the secret to grasping the novelty of Blumenbach's taxonomy is in his invention of the

---

Dār al-Fikr, 1973, 2/6

[8] The five racial varieties according to Blumenbach are: 1) the Caucasian; 2) the Mongoloid; 3) the Ethiopian; 4) the American; and 5) the Malay variety. (Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. *Anthropological Treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach,* "On the Natural Varieties of Man", London: Anthropological Society of London, 1865, p. 264).

term "Caucasian": a term which would apply to the light-skinned peoples of Europe, Western Asia, and North Africa (or Eurasia).[9] Blumenbach says about the Caucasian variety,

> I have taken the name of this variety from Mount Caucasus, both because its neighborhood, and especially the southern slope, produces the most beautiful race of men, I mean the Georgian; and because all the physiological reasons converge on this, that in that region, if anywhere, it seems we ought with greatest probability to place the autochthones of mankind...That stock displays...the most beautiful form of the skull, from which, as from a mean and primeval type, the others diverge...Besides, it is white in color, which we may fairly assume to be the primitive color of mankind, since...it is very easy to degenerate into brown, but very much more difficult for dark to become white.[10]

The problem with the "Caucasian" category lay not in the simple attempt to classify a large mass of ethnically differentiated groups of people. It lay in the fact that it advances upon the presumption of the archetypical humanity and beauty of those of the Georgian stock and the degeneration of all others deduced from the subjective examination of the cranium and the judgment of it being "the most beautiful form of skull." It is precisely this superficial and pseudo-scientific analysis that leads Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895) —though being more blatant in his own racism[11]—to say, Of all the odd myths that have arisen in the scientific world, the "Caucasian mystery" invented quite innocently by Blumenbach is the oddest. A Georgian woman's skull was the handsomest in his collection. Hence it became his model exemplar of human skulls, from which all others might be regarded as deviations; and out of this, by some strange intellectual hocus-pocus, grew up the notion that the Caucasian man is the prototypic "Adamic" man.[12]

---

[9] Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. *The Anthropological Treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach*, "On the Natural Varieties of Mankind", London: The Anthropological Society, 1865, p. 265

[10] Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. *The Anthropological Treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach*, "On the Natural Varieties of Mankind", London: The Anthropological Society, 1865, p. 269

[11] As a matter of fact, Thomas Huxley, his colleague, Charles Darwin, and all other evolutionists of the Enlightenment were racists.

[12] Matthew Frye Jacobson. *Whiteness of a Different Color*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 1

It is quite possible [and is often the case] for a learned person to be recognized as a moral exemplar while simultaneously entertaining erroneous or blinkered opinions about people, life, nature, science, and society. Take for example that many medieval jurists posited that if a person drank from water that has been heated by sunlight, it would lead to vitiligo (*baraṣ*).[13] The famous Andalusian exegete of Cordova, Muhammad b. Ahmad Al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), spoke condemningly about earlier scholars he contested had mistakenly interpreted Qur'ānic verses concerning the human reproductive process to mean that only the male's sperm is responsible for procreation, when in fact—he argues—it is from the meeting of both the male and female reproductive fluids.[14]

---

[13] This belief is pervasive among several jurists in the four Sunni schools. Ahmad b. Ahmad al-Shinqīṭī while commenting on Khalīl b. Isḥāq's statement ("like sun-heated [water]") says, "In other words, the use of sun-heated water is undesirable (*makrūh*) with the understanding that the prohibition concerning that matter means dislike [not unlawfulness]. And the most reliable information that exists concerning that is what has been conveyed by Al-Dāraquṭnī about 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb who said, "Do not bathe with sun-heated [water]. For surely it leads to vitiligo (*baraṣ*)." (Al-Shinqīṭī, Ahmad b. Ahmad al-Mukhtār. *Mawāhib al-Jalīl min Adillah Khalīl*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2005, 1/25-26). The Shāfi'ī scholar, Qāḍī Abū Shujā Ahmad b. al-Ḥusayn said when explaining the different types of water, "And [one type is] pure and purifying whose use is undesirable (*makrūh*). That form is sun-heated water." The scholar Mājid al-Ḥamawī comments on this statement saying, "[And it is sun-heated water] in a rusted vessel (which is the kind that is protracted through hammering such as iron or copper, because the sun isolates a malodorous smell from it that alights upon the water. Then when it encounters the body, vitiligo is feared) and in a hot region. But the dislike is removed through cooling." (Qāḍī Abū Shujā' Ahmad b. al-Ḥusayn. *Matn al-Ghāyah wa al-Taqrīb fī al-Fiqh al-Shāfi'ī*, Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2004, p. 26).

[14] Al-Qurṭubī says in his exegesis while commenting on the Qur'ānic verse, "O humanity! Verily We created you from a male and a female..." (Q 49:13),

> "Some people among the early generations held the view that the fetus is formed from the man's fluid alone and grows in the mother's womb borrowing strength from the blood contained within it. They cited as proof God's saying, *"Have We not created you from a despicable fluid, and then placed you in a firm resting place?"* (Q 77:20-21) as well as his saying, *"Then He made his progeny (nasl) from a quintessence (sulālah) of despicable fluid"* (Q 32:8) and His saying, *"Was he not a drop of sperm ejected?"* (Q 75:37) And that indicates that the creation results from the fluid of a single entity. The correct view, however, is that the creation is formed from the fluid of both the man and the woman, considering this verse. For it is univocal, not susceptible to interpretation. And God's saying, *"He was created from a fluid gushing forth, exiting from between the spinal column (sulb) and*

Arthur De Gobineau viewed the prototypical man to be the "white" man, and that the degree of success and civilization of people is commensurate with the extent that white [or Aryan] blood flows in their veins. For Gobineau and other Enlightenment thinkers, "civilization" is an extremely important term. It is the mark of the highest human intellectual achievement[15] which Gobineau charitably yields over to ten historical peoples: the Indians, Egyptians, Assyrians, Greeks, Chinese, Italians, the Germanic tribes, Alleghenians, Mexicans, and Peruvians. Gobineau's facile explanation for why each of these civilizations thrived had everything to do with the admixture of Aryan blood with each of those peoples. But, as for the negro and yellow races, he had the following to say at the conclusion of his work,

> In the above list no negro race is seen as the initiator of a civilization. Only when it is mixed with some other can it even be initiated into one. Similarly, no spontaneous civilization is to be found among the yellow races; and when the Aryan blood is exhausted stagnation supervenes.[16]

Apparently, when Gobineau speaks of the "Negro", he is not including the Ethiopian and Nubian, "and a few smaller peoples to the west of the oasis

---

> *the ribs (tarā'ib),"* means [from] the loins of men and the ribs (*tarā'ib*) of women…What they presented as proof indicates is nothing more than God's mention of the human being created from fluid, a quintessence, and the sperm without an association to any one of the two parents to the exclusion of the other. Hence, it indicates that the water and quintessence belong to the two of them and that the sperm is from both of them in light of what we have inferred from the aforementioned. It also means that the woman ejects creative fluid just as men do. Accordingly, similarity in resemblance results…God said concerning the story of Noah, *"Then the water met upon an affair which was determined."* His reference was to the water of the sky and the earth since "meeting" only happens between two things. So, no objection is to be raised against interpreting *"Then He made his progeny (nasl) from a quintessence of despicable fluid"* and *""Have We not created you from a despicable fluid"* to mean the combination of two fluids. And Allah knows best."

Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Anṣārī Al-Qurṭubī. *Al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1952, 8/16/343

[15] Arthur Gobineau, Adrian Collins. *The Inequality of Human Races*, New York: G.P. Putman's Sons. 1915, p. 154.

[16] Arthur Gobineau, Adrian Collins. *The Inequality of Human Races*, New York: G.P. Putman's Sons. 1915, p. 212.

of Ammon" who comprise elements of the Egyptian civilization he extols.[17] This degree of distinction seems to conform to what is typical among Arab writers against "blacks" who have the most unflattering things to say about those of the Zanzibar and Tanzania i.e. the "Zanj" people. This intimates that anti-black sentiment among many writers on race perhaps has a less generalized target than commonly understood. Add the concept of civilization, and one not only has a false standard for judging human worth. One possesses an entire imperialistic ideology that justifies military conquest, mass murder, forced religious conversion, and permanent free labor servitude. The fundamental problem with so-called "civilization" is that it spawned from the false imagination of the Enlightenment. The proof of its novelty is in the very fact that its meaning was debated. This is precisely why we observe Gobineau objecting to Francois Guizot's (d. 1874) characterization of civilization as an "event"[18] to then assert his own corrective to this as, "a state of relative stability, where the mass of men try to satisfy their wants, and are refined in their conduct and intelligence."[19] Conquest and compulsion are key requirements of Gobineau's civilization, since its credit derives fundamentally from its capacity to influence, and its ability to "impose its laws on vast multitudes of men." Accordingly, "[...] as soon as the multitudes enroll themselves under a banner, or—to speak more exactly—as soon as a particular form of administration is accepted, a civilization is born."[20]

If that is so, Gobineau should have classified the nations of Ghana and Takrūr of which Ibn Khaldun noted to be nations that were able to "impose its will on vast multitudes of men" as was the case with at least the *Limlim* people who were conquered, captured, and sold into slavery—as civilizations. But, maybe, Gobineau's belief was that such feats were only possible [as well as the feats achieved by African empires like the Sukoto and Songhai], because of some admixture with Aryan blood. But there is scant evidence that the monarchs of the great African kingdoms underwent some degree of "hybridization."

A consistent theme of Gobineau's work is his contempt for the negroid races. If the white or Aryan is to be placed at the top of the racial hierarchy, then the Negro is clearly only a step up from the brute.[21] Of them, he had the following to say,

---

[17] Arthur Gobineau, Adrian Collins. *The Inequality of Human Races*, New York: G.P. Putman's Sons. 1915, p. 211.

[18] Arthur Gobineau, Adrian Collins. *The Inequality of Human Races*, New York: G.P. Putman's Sons. 1915, p. 77.

[19] Arthur Gobineau, Adrian Collins. *The Inequality of Human Races*, New York: G.P. Putman's Sons. 1915, p. 91

[20] Arthur Gobineau, Adrian Collins. *The Inequality of Human Races*, New York: G.P. Putman's Sons. 1915, p. 89

> The negroid variety is the lowest, and stands at the foot of the ladder. The animal character, that appears in the shape of the pelvis, is stamped on the negro from birth, and foreshadows his destiny. His intellect will always move within a very narrow circle. He is not however a mere brute, for behind his low receding brow, in the middle of his skull, we can see signs of a powerful energy, however crude its objects. If his mental faculties are dull or even non-existent, he often has an intensity of desire, and so of will, which may be called terrible. Many of his senses, especially taste and smell, are developed to an extent unknown to the other two races. The very strength of his sensations is the most striking proof of his inferiority.[22]

These words echo sentiments expressed about negroes by some early historians like Galen, al-Kindī, and Al-Mas'ūdī. We have already cited what Ibn Khaldun (d. 808/1406) reports in his famous, *Al-Muqaddimah.*[23] But, Gobineau's "master race" ideology does not stop with a declaration of the superiority of European intelligence and civilization. He also avers that the "white" races are the most beautiful, and most physically endowed in strength, form, and proportion. It is only through hybridization that the primitive characteristics of each stock degenerate and are thrown into disorder. He says,

> The white race originally possessed the monopoly on beauty, intelligence, and strength. By its union with other varieties, hybrids were created, which were beautiful without strength, strong without intelligence, or, if intelligent, both weak and ugly. Further, when the quantity of white blood was increased to an indefinite amount by successive infusions, and not by a single admixture, it no longer carried with it its natural advantages, and often merely increased the confusion already existing in the racial elements.[24]

---

[21] This view was shared by evolutionists, like Charles Darwin and Thomas Huxley as well.

[22] Arthur Gobineau, Adrian Collins. *The Inequality of Human Races*, New York: G.P. Putman's Sons. 1915, p. 204.

[23] See 'Abd Al-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldun. *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldun*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiya, 1993, p. 66.

[24] Arthur Gobineau, Adrian Collins. *The Inequality of Human Races*, New York: G.P. Putman's Sons. 1915, p. 210.

The Legacy of Scientific Racism

Gobineau, Blumenbach, Guizot (1787-1874), and many others writing about "racial anatomy" or "craniometrics" were not all German. These were people credited with and/or riding the wave of the newest sociological, scientific, and political revolutions that ushered in a new age of collective awareness. The fact that Gobineau and others were aristocrats and men of letters provided them with access to the ears of the most influential statesmen and revolutionaries of their times. This speaks volumes of just how entrenched their theories would become and gain acceptance. Just two years after the election of America's first president, General George Washington (1788), he would preside over the very first Naturalization Act (1790) wherein the qualifications for citizenship were spelled out; among which included the non-negotiable condition of being a "free white person." It would be nearly a century later (1870) that blacks would gain the rights to citizenship and political participation. By 1924, the US Congress would pass the Racial Integrity Act which legally polarized American society into the non-colored/colored binary and further strengthened miscegenation laws outlawing intermarriage between Whites and non-Whites. This act established the so-called "one-drop rule" that reinforced assumptions of genotypic distinctions between Whites and non-Whites in light of the eugenics revolution. This legislation fundamentally disqualified any person from "whiteness" who was discovered of having any percentage of African or Native American blood. Despite the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act that overthrew the Natural Origins Formula of 1924, nearly two decades into the 21st century has not altered the collective self-apprehensions of both Whites and Blacks in America. In other words, even though the Racial Integrity Act suffered annulment by 1965, its effect remains a pivotal source of identity perception among both Blacks and Whites.

"Race" is the consequence of a long process of negotiation between culturally distinct slices of society, but at other times it is imposed upon unwilling populations. The indoctrination process into American "whiteness" is the greatest proof of the latter. An example of the former is the Arabization of the Islamic peoples outside of Arabia, like Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, and the like. These people "chose" for themselves the Arab designation after centuries of hybridization, interaction, and negotiation. The Celts, Jews, Italians, Spanish, and others, likewise, fused with the larger Anglo-Saxon "white" race during the middle decades of the 20th century.

Turning our attention merely to the country of Mexico unearths at least 16 hybrid versions of *mestizas* whose roots are an admixture of Spanish male settlers and Native Mexican women. Turning our attention to modern-day

Brazil, similarly, reveals a much more complicated racial configuration than what the typical north American would recognize. If in America, a Black woman cannot have a White child due to the "one-drop rule", in Brazil, with just as multifarious and kaleidoscopic of a "colored" culture, any Brazilian child born to a couple of mixed origin is subjected to a "racial continuum." Accordingly, a child possessing White blood is instead deemed to be "not" Black, unlike the situation in the US. This is precisely because racial conceptions and perceptions in Brazil (and even Haiti) differ greatly from those found in the US. Consequently, Matthew Frye Jacobson says, "The American eye sees a certain person as black, for instance, whom Haitian or Brazilian eyes might see as white."[25] This particular taxonomy of race, while still controversial due to how it relegates Brazilian "Blacks" to nearly permanent economic disadvantage, maybe much more attractive than the one adopted in the US, since it at least affords to a larger slice of society greater social and psychological empowerment than American society might allow. But the matter is still one worthy of debate.

The point is that "race" evolved from a term intended only to classify distinct color and phenotypic variation among people into a word that denoted not only differences in physicality and appearance, but also of certain preset inalterable [or "natural"] behavioral dispositions. More comprehensive race taxonomic theories [beyond the common black-white-yellow tripartite iterations] which stratify ethnic populations according to racial hierarchy, however, had not yet been promulgated until the mid to late 18th century. That notwithstanding, legal precedents restricting perpetual servitude to Africans and similar non-whites in the North American English colonies had already started to take root in 17th century Virginia.[26] The institution of miscegenation laws[27] along with Euro-Christian theorizing about the "curse of Ham" which provided the theological undergirding for the permanent enslavement of blacks now offered European colonialists all they needed to live a guilt-free existence in their newly found homeland. In this "new world" where secular order ruled by reason, science, economics, and "Christian" slavery the deepening of "class" disparities would now become even easier to accomplish. Around this same period, the darker skinned peoples of North Africa under Muslim rule finding themselves a political

---

[25] Matthew Frye Jacobson. *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 10.

[26] Michael L. Conniff /Thomas J. Davis. *Africans in the Americas: A History of the Black Diaspora*, Caldwell, New Jersey: The Blackburn Press, 1994, p. 128

[27] Michael L. Conniff /Thomas J. Davis. *Africans in the Americas: A History of the Black Diaspora*, Caldwell, New Jersey: The Blackburn Press, 1994, p. 81

[and, perhaps, "cultural"] minority would also be apprehended by some of its intellectual elite as people most similar in resemblance to "slaves" (pace Al-Ṣāwī); a thing that leaves one to wonder just how coincidental this sentiment was among the people of Egypt in light of the ideational shifts happening in Europe at that time. Of course, it would be easy to blame the "blackening" of the entire slave enterprise on the Europeans were it not for the fact that conceptions of white presumptive beauty and black presumptive undesirability predated the Middle Passage in the Muslim world. The evidence for this is laden in the very books written by pre-modern authors, like Ibn al-Jawzī and al-Suyūṭī, who both relate prophetic traditions that intimate at a widely held view among blacks themselves preferring lighter skin tones to their own darker complexions.

The Word "Negro" in 20th Century America

The fact that the word "Negro" lost many of its negative denotations during 20th century America does not prove that it was not originally utilized to describe a stark naked cannibalized human being from East Africa. But, even before "African American" became the most common designation for formerly enslaved peoples of African descent, they were commonly referred to and self-referentially as "Negroes."

The 20th century African American activist Richard B. Moore (1893-1978) in his *The Name Negro, Its Origin, and Its Evil Use*, fiercely advocated for relinquishing the use of the term "Negro" and adopting the designation "Afro" or "African American." Moore did not appreciate the fact that the term denoted unequal civil status being that the only difference between a 'Nigger' and a 'Negro' was that one was a slave and the other was supposedly free. Both unfortunately still suffered the stigma of subhuman status and/or second, third, or even fourth-class citizenship. In addition, Moore felt that by prefixing "American" with "Afro/African" would serve as a type of psychocultural equalizer inasmuch that others who immigrated to America also sported a hyphenated identity based upon land, culture, and history.

On the other hand, the African American historian Carter G. Woodson (1875-1950), wrote in his *The Miseducation of the Negro*,

> It doesn't matter what the thing is called as what the thing is. The Negro would not cease to be what he is by calling him something else; but, if he will struggle and make something of himself and contribute to modern culture, the world will learn to look upon him as an American rather than as one of an undeveloped element of the population.

He further says,

> There is nothing to be gained by running away from the name. The names of practically all races and nations at times have connoted insignificance and low social status. Angles and Saxons, once the slaves of Romans, experienced this; and even the name of the Greek for a while meant no more than this to these conquerors of the world. The people who bore these names, however, have made them grand and illustrious. The Negro must learn to do the same.[28]

---

[28] Woodson, Carter G. *The Miseducation of the Negro*. USA: SoHoBooks (no date), p. 136.

Introduction

Every religious community struggles to maintain a balance between religious ideals and socio-historical realities. While the sages seem to embody all the good a given religion has to offer, efforts to prove that one's religion plays a major role in one's ethical formation and civilizational accomplishments are frustrated every time we witness savagery and injustice justified in the name of a given religion. For Islam, more than any other religion today, this challenge is particularly difficult to overcome in light of a number of negative stereotypes. Islam's exemplar *par excellence* is the Prophet Muhammad, who is for Muslims the universal symbol of human perfection. It is his ethos that committed Muslims seek to embody.

The reality is that no single factor independently contributes to the ethical formation of a given person; so, reducing the cause of a phenomenon like violence to mere religious or militant "ideology" is intellectually lazy, to say the least. Theology can, undoubtedly, have a positive or negative influence on a person's conduct, but that is insufficient to explain a given person's primal motivations for acting. It is precisely for this reason that Prophet Muhammad said, "You will find that people are mines. The best of them in pre-Islamic ignorance will be the best of them in Islam once they become learned."[29] In other words, to the extent of one's predilection toward virtue prior to accepting Islam shall one excel in virtue as a Muslim. And as one gains more knowledge of the religion, his/her ethical condition is expected to improve. For this reason, the Qur'ān says, *"And we send down from the Qur'ān what is a cure and mercy for the believers, while it only increases the wrongdoers in ruin"* (Q 17:82).

These introductory remarks are meant to provide a context for understanding one of the main goals of this book, which is to humanize classical Muslim scholars. For if we do not acknowledge that learned sages and clergymen are also susceptible to scriptural misinterpretation, we will either too readily embrace their problematic views or we will commit gratuitous violence against them when we decide that they are unreliable receptacles of wisdom in light of the discovery of personal bias and prejudice.

---

[29] Yahyā b. Sharaf Al-Nawwawī, *Sharh Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995), volume 8, part 2, p. 66.

Perhaps, no other area more seriously reflects this challenge than the matter of "black" antipathy. To highlight this concern, I entitled this book, *The "Negro" in Arab Muslim Consciousness.* The assertion is that the "Negro" and the "African" are not completely coterminous from the standpoint of anthropological classification. Certainly, the term "Negro" has been utilized in America to refer to any person discovered as possessing any degree of sub-Saharan/black African heritage. We know, however, that the Sahara is merely a part of the African continent, and its surrounding inhabitants represent only a portion of its people. In addition, for the early Arabs and other Muslims, both the idea of a "continent" and one bordering Arabia called "Africa" would have been unfamiliar territory. The only "Africa" that any of them would have been familiar with would have been 'Ifrīqiyā'; that is the northwestern sector (Libya, Algeria, Tunisia), a name popularized during the Roman Empire's rule of that region.

The term "Negro" is believed by some to have come into use in English during the Transatlantic slave trade as a convenient way to describe "uncivilized" sub-Saharan Blacks, especially those who were enslaved. The Arabic-English lexicographers, Hans Wehr[30] (1909-1981) and J.G. Hava[31], both translate the Arabic word, "*Zanj*" as, "Negro." The word, "Zanj," was used by medieval Arabs as a general reference to East-Africans near the Horn of Africa and more specifically for Bantu-speaking cannibals originally from the region of Zanzibar and Tanzania.[32] This is even though the term's history extends well beyond the creation of the English word, "Negro." So, it would appear inappropriately retroactive and anachronistic to consider them perfect synonyms. There is, however, good reason to consider this a fitting translation.

---

[30] Hans Wehr. *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, Cowan 4th Ed. Urbana, IL: Spoken Languages Services, Inc., 1994, p. 382.

[31] J.G. Hava. *Arabic English Dictionary For Advanced Learners (al-Farā'id al-Durriyyah)*, New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2001, p. 297.

[32] Zanzibar or *Zanjibār* is believed to originate from Arabic. It is a composite of the two words 'zanj' for 'Blacks' and 'barr' for 'land.' In other words, it means 'black lands.' As will be presented later, the unknown author of a particular history written in 372/982 entitled, *Ḥudūd al-'Ālam* (Limits of the World), offers a somewhat harsh characterization of their lack of civilization (Unknown Author, Yūsuf al-Hādi Edition. *Ḥudūd al-'Ālam min al-Sharq ilā al-Gharb*, Cairo: li al-Nashr, 1999, p. 145) as does Ibn Khaldun when speaking of a sub-Saharan people called the *Limlim* ('Abd Al-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldun . *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldun*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1993, p. 43).

The 14th century Egyptian lexicographer, Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Fayyūmī (834/1368), in his *Al-Miṣbāḥ Al-Munīr* defines the Zanj people as,

> A group of Blacks (*al-Sūdān*) who live south of the equator. Beyond them there is no civilization (*'imārah*). Some have said: Their lands extend from the Maghrib (in the western coast) to close to Ethiopia. And some of their lands are located upon the Nile of Egypt.[33]

This definition provides us with both location and physical description of the inhabitants of this region. Firstly, we know that the *Zanj* live near or "below" the equator. Secondly, we know that they have black skin. Then, a third note about the *Zanj* is that they are not "the" but "a" group (*tā'ifah*) of Blacks, which underscores the fact that premodern anthropologists did not view all "Blacks" in homogenous terms. This is important for our discussion, since as already suggested, the Zanj may have been "black", but not all "Blacks" were affiliated with the *Zanj*. Perhaps, this explains why the 15th century lexicographer, Muhammad al-Fayrūzābādī (816/1415), describes the Zanj merely as, "a nation of Blacks" *(jīl min al-sūdān)*.[34]

On the other hand, the Oxford English Dictionary defines the "Negro" as, "a member of a dark-skinned group of peoples originally native to sub-Saharan Africa." This primary definition of the "Negro" corresponds with Al-Fayyūmi's "Zanj" in that the "Negro" is: 1) a person with black skin, and 2) a person who originates from sub-Saharan Africa. Perhaps, one subtle distinction which can be made is that in terms of latitude Al-Fayyūmi's "Zanj" is a subequatorial person, while the "Negro" is characterized merely as "sub-Saharan." Despite this subtlety, both the sub-Sahara and equatorial regions are known to be lands inhabited by "Blacks," which would strongly suggest translational equivalency between the two terms (Zanj = Negroes), especially since Al-Fayyūmī highlights that some hold that the *Zanj* region extends from Ethiopia and parts of the Nile in the east to the Maghrib on the western coast.

Another important point is that realities precede their designations. That the word "Negro" was adopted during the Transatlantic slave trade does not mean that the concept of the uncivilized black was unfamiliar to earlier cultures. This is no more the case than the tenuous notion that just because ancient people did not have a concept for "continent" that the land mass we describe today as "Africa" did not exist. For there are countless words in various languages invented to describe a variety of objects, inventions, discoveries, concepts, and phenomena, which already existed in the lives and minds of people. So, to argue that words like 'city,' 'stone,' 'wheat,' 'horse,' or 'wisdom' are English words whose pronunciation differs greatly from their synonyms in other languages or that they were simply borrowed from them in a certain century, would be to suggest that the history of a concept or phenomenon begins with the invention of its popular designation. Even the racialized terms, 'white,' 'black,' and 'Arab' as will be utilized throughout this book have been in flux over the centuries. In addition, the fact that "Negro" lost many of its more negative connotations during 20th century America does not prove that it was not originally utilized to describe a stark-naked cannibalistic human being from east Africa.

---

[33] Ahmad Al-Fayyūmī. *Al-Misbāḥ Al-Munīr*, Beirut: Al-Maktabah Al-'Aṣriyyah, 1997, p.134.

[34] Muhammad b. Ya'qūb al-Fayrūzābādī. *Al-Qāmūs Al-Muḥīt*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995, p. 175

According to historian John G. Jackson (1907-1993),

> In the literature on Africa, Africans are commonly identified in two groups: one progressive, the other backward. The progressive peoples are called Hamites, Kushites, Moors, etc., whereas the backward ones are called Negroes.[35]

This connection between "Negro" and "Zanj" is interesting to say the least. Among several medieval Muslim writers, the "Zanj" designation applied to a particular type of East-African known for a lack of "civilization";[36] and, for others, a stark-naked equatorial "savage" cannibal who many considered to be nearest in kin to the "brute."[37]

---

[35] John G. Jackson goes further to say,

> The word Negro was manufactured during the Atlantic Slave Trade; or to put it another way, there are many species of small fish in the ocean; when put into cans they are called sardines. There are no free fish called sardines; they only get that name when canned. No free Africans were called Negroes; they got that name only after being enslaved. A fish becomes a sardine when imprisoned in a can, and Africans became Negroes when they were put in chains." See Jackson's introductions to Stanley Lane-Poole, *The Story of the Moors in Spain*. Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1990, page (3) of Introduction.

[36] One particular history written circa 982 by an unknown author entitled, *Ḥudūd al-'Ālam* (*Limits of the World*), has the following to say about the people of sub-Sahara, The people of the areas of the south are all black due to the hotness of the climate. And most of them are nude. Gold is found in their lands and towns. And they are remote from the point of human equilibrium (*ḥadd i' tidāl al-bashar*). Unknown Author (Yūsuf al-Hādi Edition). *Ḥudūd al-'Ālam min al-Sharq ilā al-Gharb*, Cairo: Al-Dār Al-Thaqāfiyyah li al-Nashr, 1999, p. 145.

The Arabic history entitled, *Ḥudūd al-'Ālam* (*Limits of the World*), offered the following comments about the lands of the Zanj,

> Its inhabitants have broad faces, large physiques, and kinky hair. Their natures are as that of untamed animals, and they have intensely black skin. There is enmity between them and the people of Abyssinia and the *Zābij*.[38]

'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. Khaldun (808/1406), the 15th century Tunisian Mālikī historian, had the following to say about certain African tribes of the equatorial region,

> ...and south of this Nile there are a people among the Blacks called *Limlim* who happen to be unbelievers. They brand their faces and temples. The people of Ghana and Takrūr invade them, take them as captives, sell them to merchants, and take them to the *Maghrib*. Nearly all of them are slaves, and there exists no civilization beyond them to the south except for peoples who are more akin to inarticulate animals than those who are articulate. They reside in open deserts, caves, eat grass, and unprepared seeds, and some are cannibals who are not to be counted among humans.[39]

* * * * *

I write as a black American[40] Muslim who teaches Islamic law, theology, and other important areas of Islamic Studies. I am a child of parents who

---

An earlier traveler, chronicler, and historian, Ali b. al-Ḥusayn al-Mas'ūdī (d. 953), says of the Zanj, "Some of them have sharp teeth and eat one another."

Ali b. al-Ḥusayn Al-Mas'ūdī. *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma'ādin al-Jawhar*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1973, vol. 2/page 6.

[37] Arthur Gobineau, Adrian Collins. *The Inequality of Human Races*, New York: G.P. Putman's Sons. 1915, p. 204.

[38] Unknown Author. *Ḥudūd al-'Ālam min al-Sharq ilā al-Gharb*, edited by Yūsuf al-Hādi, Cairo: Al-Dār Al-Thaqāfiyyah li al-Nashr, 1999, p. 145.

[39] 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. Khaldun. *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldun*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1993, p. 43.

[40] What I mean by the term "black American" here is the one whose ancestors were predominantly from Africa or one who is native to the United States (i.e. not born in Africa) and classified as "Black" according to US racial standards.

converted from Christianity to Islam during the 60's via the black-nationalist self-empowerment self-improvement religious organization known as the Nation of Islam. My parents would later transition into the normative Islamic tradition, becoming Sunnis a few years after my birth under the leadership of the late Imam Wallace D. Muhammad (1933-2008), son of Honorable Elijah Muhammad (1897-1975), who inherited leadership of the Nation of Islam from his teacher, Fard Muhammad (born 1877). Malcolm X (1925-1965), who served as the national spokesman for the Nation of Islam before his assassination in 1965, broke with the NOI and told of his experience of a universal brotherhood of humanity discovered in the lands of Islam during his pilgrimage to Mecca and other Islamic territories. Malcolm's accounts published in his autobiography deeply touched the hearts of many and led many people of diverse backgrounds to convert to Islam over the decades since. Malcolm's accounts corroborated the popular assertion of Islam being the only racially egalitarian religion and the only one fit to overcome the problem of racial discrimination, which has plagued the world for centuries. Gandhi (1869-1948) expressed this same sentiment to Dr. Howard Thurman (1899-1981) on the latter's visit to India.[41] During the prophetic era, the universality of Islam was underscored through the inclusion of four personalities in the inner circle of the Prophet Muhammad: Bilal the Ethiopian; Salman the Persian; Abdullah the Jew; and Suhayb the Greek.[42]

Today, many have begun to challenge Muslim claims of Islam's racial egalitarianism in light of more and more scholars unearthing a culture of bigotry among some of Islam's noted theologians and jurists, along with proof of mistreatment and prejudicial dealings toward indigenous Muslim Africans during the prophetic era and after the Arab incursion into the African continent. Malcolm X's experiences have been useful for the image of Arabs particularly, especially in light of constant Pan-Africanist assertions that Arabs played a pivotal role in the Transatlantic slave trade. As my research will reveal, it was to the black-skinned Bantu-speaking, bare-skinned cannibalistic East African of the Sub-Sahara that most medieval writers referred when remarking disparagingly about Blacks. It is they who represent the prototypical, stereotypical "Negro," as I will later explain.

---

[41] Dr. Howard Thurman, founder of the Church for the Fellowship of all Peoples in San Francisco, the first interracial, interdenominational church in the United States, said while speaking of his meeting with Gandhi during a trip to India,

> Gandhi wondered why the slaves did not become Muslims. It was a sheer speculation but in theory it was a sound idea, for, as he took pains to point out, the religion of Mohammed is the only world religion that does not practice discrimination within the faith itself. In the presence of Allah there is neither rich or poor, wise or foolish, black or white, brown or yellow—but all are one before Him. This means encompassing all diversity and all differences.

Howard Thurman. *The Luminous Darkness*, Richmond, Indiana: Friends United Press: 1989, p. 60.

[42] Ṣuhayb was an Arab who had lived in the Roman Empire or had been a captive there and, thus, was called *Al-Rumi*, "the Greek." See Ibn Athīr, Ali b. Muhammad al-Jazarī, *Usd al-Ghābah fī Ma'rifah al- Ṣahābah*. Beirut: Dār Ibn Hazm, 2012, p. 575.

It should be understood as well that the mere preference for one color over another does not in itself constitute racism. The preference of one's own color or ethnic identity to another is, rather, what some term "ethnocentrism." Racism, on the other hand, is manifest once the political institutions in a given society espouse and enforce policies which privilege one group of people and disentitle others to the same rights on the mere basis of skin color or another ethnic determinant.[43]

---

[43] Professor Goldenberg has the following to say in *The Curse of Ham*,

> Lloyd Thompson points out that a major flaw of many studies on racism in classical antiquity is the confusion between aesthetic preference and racial prejudice. Disparagement of black somatic features is not in and of itself racist. Only when a society's internal structures are discriminatory and its ideology justifies such discrimination can that society be considered racist. Otherwise we are merely looking at "ethnocentric reactions to black otherness and mere expressions of conformism to the dominant aesthetic values." Ethnocentricism is not tantamount to racism. The former recognizes physical reality, the latter orders that reality into a hierarchy of domination. Gayraud Wilmore, an African American theologian, put it this way:
>
>> If one prefers one skin color over another, whether white or black, or black over white, with the implication of aesthetic, genetic or cultural superiority, the seeds of racial prejudice are already present. And when that preference is not simply a natural, almost subconscious ethnocentricism, but a self-justifying concomitant of economic, political and cultural domination and exploitation, color prejudice is raised to the level of ideology that stretches from a rather benign "racial thinking" to full-blown racial hatred, brutality and potential genocide.
>
> In other words, the difference between ethnocentricism and racism is a "self-justifying concomitant of economic, political and cultural domination and exploitation." Without it the seeds of racial prejudice will not germinate and take root.

This book aims to present the argument, particularly to uncritical Muslim readers and teachers of the Islamic tradition, that cultural bias at times has influenced saintly personalities' interpretation of the revealed law. This was the case, especially, with major authorities in the Mālikī legal school, which was adopted in North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Andalus (Muslim Spain). Therefore, it is important to understand the perils of encouraging blind uncritical acceptance of scholarly spiritual authority.[44] The book also highlights the sources that reinforce black antipathy in the general Islamic tradition (*e.g.* marital undesirability, presumed dysmorphia, animalistic impulse) and in the Mālikī School more specifically (*viz.* unequal social protections for "black" women seeking marriage),[45] along with reactions from Muslim scholars living before, during, and after the European Age of Enlightenment. I will contend that African Muslims did not view themselves as a racially homogenous collective, the very thing which made it possible for so many of them to dispense with "black" disapprobation.

Research of this nature should be of particular importance to Muslim clerics and public figures to help them clearly see the perils of encouraging blind uncritical acceptance of scholarly spiritual authority. Sufis, for instance, teach that if one has no spiritual guide, he is guided by Satan; another teaching is that an initiate's relationship to his spiritual guide should be like the Prophet's companions' relationship to Prophet Muhammad.[46] In other words, just as Prophet Muhammad's companions were expected

---

David M. Goldenberg. *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, London and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, pp. 198-199.

[44] The 11th century Sufi authority, 'Abd Al-Karīm Al-Qushayrī (465/1047), said, "It is inappropriate for an initiate to believe that the spiritual masters (*mashāyikh*) are infallible."

Abū al-Qāsim 'Abd Al-Karīm al-Qushayrī. *Al-Risālah Al-Qushayriyyah*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2005, p. 431.

[45] In the Mālikī School, the "black" woman is a species of "ignoble" and "undesirable" women referred to as '*daniyyah*' or 'low caste.' Singling out the black woman in this way should not be understood to suggest that only black women as opposed to Arab, Persian, or European women were given the default status of "ignoble" (*daniyyah*). Other examples of low caste women were the formerly enslaved (*mu'taqah*), beggars, and those involved in menial service, like flour-making. The color of the woman was generally deemed negligible in the determination of her being placed in the category of low caste. The point, however, is to highlight an apparent trend amongst certain North African Arab jurists and historians who made the inherent ugliness of blackness among other things a matter of religious doctrine.

[46] The Andalusian Sufi sage known as Ibn 'Abbād al-Rundī (792/1390) said,

to yield unwittingly to his directives when speaking as an emissary of God, so should the initiates into a given spiritual order unquestioningly surrender their own whims and opinions over to those of their 'shaykh' (spiritual master). If that is so, how should one respond when a spiritual guide utters a negative opinion of Blacks or a misogynistic view about women, for instance?

If scholarly exemplars can be influenced in their religious views by cultural bias, there is very little basis for imagining them to be the exclusive receptacles and articulators of the divine will. Notwithstanding the prophetic tradition which declares scholars to be "the heirs of the prophets," the discovery of biased and bigoted opinions among some of them gives reason to reevaluate interpretations of that tradition in idealistic rather than descriptive fashion. In other words, scholars are heirs to an intellectual legacy and ethical mission to realize human flourishing. They do not, necessarily, inherit purity of intention and clarity of thought in all matters intermediating between God and the creation.

Such a critique neither aims to undermine scholarly authority categorically nor is its goal to minimize the importance of the historical scholastic tradition. For it is my firm belief that when the classical scholarly tradition is understood correctly, it empowers and supports ideational innovation and creative thought; but it encourages innovation and thought which remain rooted in precedent, not detached from it. For every example of failure to live up to Islamic ideals, one will find vindication of the Islamic tradition, both in the prophetic example and in that of those brave scholars who responded to the ethnocentric biases of their colleagues. This is the same if the source of their views is subjective bias or a misguided sincerity to apocryphal traditions which disparage Blacks.

> It is an absolute necessity in this path for the initiate to accompany an experienced spiritual guide who has realized the refinement of his self and has become liberated from his passion. So, let him surrender himself to him, cling to his obedience and compliance in all that he advises him without doubting, interpreting, or vacillating; for they have said, "Whoever has no spiritual guide takes Satan as his spiritual guide."

Ibn 'Abbād al-Rundī. *Ghayth al-Mawāhib al-'Aliyyah fī Sharh al-Ḥikam al-'Atā'iyyah*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1998, pp. 308-309.

Yielding to the shaykh's recommendations concerning spiritual formation is one thing. It is, however, another when an initiate is both taught and believes that his/her shaykh's political or worldly opinions must become the sole or primary gauge for dealing with others and the world, as is the case with many followers of Sufi orders today.

Guiding Questions

In light of this amazing phenomenon, I was led to pose the following questions: how have black Africans been able to keep faith in a moral code they believe to be inspired by God which degrades and maligns them simply due to complexion? Did they simply ignore the disparaging claims against them as nothing more than the personal bias of bigoted jurists? Or did they define their collective identities in such a way that allowed them to exclude themselves from "black" membership? Or maybe in matters of law they relied more upon the writings of local indigenous African scholars who excised those offensive teachings from their specific legal texts? In my research I have found some evidence of African resistance to the offensive suggestions about them but also of attempts by some to disassociate themselves from any African or "black" origins. There also exist non-canonical traditions in the Islamic archives that portray Africans as accepting and reinforcing their inferior status and beauty when compared with "whites" or those of lighter pigmentation.

These are the main questions that have guided my research concerning the relationship between African and Arab Muslims. By "Arab," I mean more than those domiciled in Arabia. I, rather, include the Arabized populations outside the Arabian Peninsula who deny affinity to the black African in places like Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and those located in African countries like Morocco, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, and Sudan. Like Eurocentricism, Arabism plays a significant authoritative role among converted Muslim populations worldwide. This in some regards is natural, since the Qur'ān was revealed in the Arabic language, the final prophet was an Arab, and the canonical prayers are to be performed in the Arabic language. For those reasons and more, Arabs enjoy a significant voice of religious and cultural authority amongst Muslims. Historically, however, most of the major civilizational achievements and efforts to preserve the Islamic teachings have been the result of the due diligence of non-Arabs (e.g. Persians, Kurds, Turks).[47] Such facts are unknown to many, largely because so many non-Arab contributors to Islamic civilization appropriated

---

[47] Ibn Khaldun says,

> It is a peculiar fact that most Muslim scholars both in the scriptural and rational sciences have been non-Arabs, with few exceptions. When a scholar is of Arab origin, he is non-Arab in language, upbringing, and instruction. This is so even though the religion is Arabic-centered, and the author of its moral code was an Arab."

'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. Khaldun. *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldun*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1993, p. 466.

Arab identity as Arabs were perceived to be the most advanced civilization around at the time.

What is special?

Since this work is largely concerned with the relationship between black African and Arab peoples, I would like to highlight some things which make it distinct from certain writings in print today: Firstly, pan-Africanist writers when utilizing terms like, "White", "Black", "Negro", and "Caucasian" appear to assume that each term is and has always been understood the same way by readers everywhere. Secondly, black African slavery is dealt with as an inherently evil system and universal moral wrong, and readers are expected to share this assumption without acknowledging how the social status of certain slaves (e.g. the *Kul-Harem* of the Ottoman Turks) was sometimes superior to that of their free contemporaries. Thirdly, those authors, likewise, emphasize either the role played by European Christians and/or Arab Muslims in the Transatlantic slave trade, while minimalizing the role and culpability of indigenous Africans in the slave trade.

In contradistinction to such usage, I define the "Negro" in both theoretical and geographical terms. I underscore how both "Black" and "White" are social constructs whose meanings have been in flux over the centuries, and how they differ from one society to another. I showcase different racial taxonomies and critique the implications of some of them that associate certain innate behaviors with skin color. Then, instead of writing as an anti-Arab pan-Africanist or black Christian with a similar bias,[48] I write using the broader Islamic tradition to critique the negative interpretations of the state of the Negro/Black offered by certain influential Arab scholars. The benefit of this approach, especially as a black American Muslim, is that instead of making the specific experience of Blacks in the Americas (and in North America in particular) the background for understanding racism throughout history—as Pan-Africanist authors often do[49]—I attempt to engage the local sensibilities and aesthetic tastes of Africans and Arabs themselves. In doing so, I can better isolate the disparate historical-cultural contexts of North America from those of North Africa, a distinction absent from many writings, which contributes to confusion about the roots of racialized mistreatment in both parts of the world. Additionally, this book is likely to interest a diverse audience like specialists in diaspora studies, race and gender studies, cultural studies, liberation theology, Islamic studies, and other disciplines.

---

[48] According to the Pan-Africanist Professor Molefi Asante, "The organization of Islam has been effective, not because of any more special relationship to God than any other people, but because of the genius of its early leaders."

Molefi K. Asante, *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change* (Chicago: African American Images, 2003), p. 7.

Quotes like this and others underscore his and other Pan-Africanists' belief that Islam as a religion which tolerated slavery—and more importantly, black slavery—had no divine fiat. Rather, in the view of Asante, Islam's spread in Africa was merely the result of the physical and mental conquest of Africans, not the result of the latter being convinced of the belief in the "Arab" God and culture to be superior to their own.

This book consists of eight chapters including this introduction. All translations from Arabic sources are my own unless otherwise indicated. Chapter One is entitled, "Blackness as Perennial Other: Transhistorical Anti-Black Sentiment." This chapter posits that while color-based race classifications and racism only became pervasive world-wide after the premodern period, anti-black sentiment, however, seems to be a transhistorical, ubiquitous, and perennial phenomenon. The meaning of the sound prophetic tradition, "I was sent to the black and the red", will be discussed, while questioning whether the historical Arabs deserve to be considered a "Black" rather than "White" race. I also endeavor to unearth the theological implications and ramifications of describing the Prophet Muhammad as "Black."

Chapter Two, "North African Mālikism and its Bias Against Black Africans," is dedicated solely to the aspects of the Mālikī School which are perceived to be particularly biased against black Africans. This chapter covers the important matter of marriage guardianship and how "blackness" was typified as a universally acknowledged "ugly" characteristic.

In Chapter Three, "Perceiving "Black" Through Arab Eyes," I attempt to answer important questions concerning how the Arabs apprehended the sub-Saharan African phenotype and culture. I will discuss the implications of a number of purported prophetic traditions which disparage black Africans, and I also offer an answer to the question of whether or not racism is a part of the Islamic legacy.

---

[49] The Pan-Africanist scholar Chancellor Williams (1893-1992) said,

> The term "black" was given a rebirth by the black youth revolt. As reborn, it does not refer to the particular color of any particular person, but to the attitude of pride and devotion to the race whose homeland from times immemorial was called "The Land of the Blacks.""

Chancellor William. *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D*, Chicago: Third World Press, 1987, p. 23, footnote #1.

In Chapter Four, "The Connection between Blackness and Slavery," I deal with the development of the inseparable correlation between slave status and being black in both the Christian west and the Muslim east.

In Chapter Five, "Race Pre & Post Enlightenment," I cover the history and evolution of the concept of race, starting with a cursory overview of the most influential premodern race taxonomies originating in Western Europe and the way that Arabs conceived of ethnic identity during the prophetic era and beyond. In the process, I will show how both civilizations defined "Black" and "White" pre and post-Enlightenment.

Chapter Six, "Slavery from Arabia to Africa," deals with the prevalence of slavery in Arabia during the prophetic era, but it will also deal with the allegation that most slaves in Arabia during that period were black Africans. There will be an attempt in this chapter also to answer the question of why the Prophet Muhammad never abolished slavery, whether or not slave status in territories ruled by Muslims is comparable to chattel slavery in the European context, and some of the challenges to the abolition of slavery in Muslim countries.

Chapter Seven, "Master Racism in Judeo-Christian and Islamic Contexts", posits that black antipathy plays an integral role in theories of race superiority in both the European and Muslim traditions. This chapter will offer a type of reconciliation between Islam's perceived racial egalitarianism and Arab sociocultural privilege. It concludes with a discussion of the important place and sociocultural privilege Islam has actually given to the Prophet Muhammad's family, the Quraysh tribe, and Arabs in general.

The final chapter is entitled, "Race Taxonomies: Human Uses and Abuses of Classification." This chapter underscores how the general devaluation of people is directly connected with the natural human need for designation and classification. The Qur'ānic portrayal of God's bestowal of this gift upon Adam as the basis for him being entitled to vicegerency (*khilāfah*) as opposed to other creatures, will be covered in this chapter. This chapter will show how mis-definition and misclassification are at the root of color-based prejudice in general and anti-black sentiment in particular.

CHAPTER 1

Blackness as Perennial Other: Transhistorical Anti-Black Sentiment

The original inhabitants of Arabia...were not the familiar Arabs of our own time, but a very much darker people. A protonegroid belt of mankind stretched across the ancient world from Africa to Malaya. This belt, by environmental and other evolutionary processes, became in parts transformed, giving rise to the Hamitic peoples of Africa to the Dravidian peoples of India, and to an intermediate dark people inhabiting the Arabian Peninsula. In the course of time two big migrations of fair-skinned peoples came from the north, one of them the mongoloids, to break through and transform the dark belt of man beyond India, and the other, the Caucasoids, to drive a wedge between India and Africa.

Dr. Bertram Thomas (1892-1950)
Former Prime Minister to the Sultan of Muscat and Oman

Ethiopia was known both in Egyptian ruins and in the Torah by the name, Kush. Ethiopia is the name the Greeks gave to all the lands of the Blacks and those of intensely dark brown skin. It means, "black face" or "burnt." When it is used without qualification, it refers to the lands of the Sudanese, Abyssinians, and the Arabs...[50]

Na'ūm Shuqayr (1864-1922),
Author of the *History of the Blacks* (*Tārīkh al-Sūdān*)

---

[50] Na'ūm Shuqayr. *Tārīkh al-Sūdān*, Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1981, vol. 1/p. 9.

The subject of race is extremely volatile and has changed throughout history in many different parts of the world. But it was between the period of the Transatlantic slave trade and the onset of modernity that color stratification became the most prominent factor for determining racial difference in the Western world. Despite this fact, there are many indicators that the devaluation of black skin has remained a perennial challenge for most societies as will be highlighted much later.

This transformation in criteria for race determination and the modern iconic image of the white-skinned Arab distort the reality of Arab authenticity and originality. Arabs, today, are perceived of as a subcategory of "Whites" with few ever questioning just how the Arabs become "White." One reason for this is that, historically, the process of Arabization was accelerated by the fact that the primary criteria for incorporation into Arabness was the adoption of the Arab language. This cultural phenomenon led to the remarkable numbers of original brown and black Arabs of Arabia being dwarfed by the numbers of those of much lighter complexion from the Levant and North Africa. Later, we will see how this transition was expressed in prophetic terms when we take a look at the prophetic tradition, "I had a vision of myself being followed by black sheep who were being followed by a flock of white sheep until the black sheep could no longer be seen."[51] The second contributor to white skin domination amongst the Arab population can be traced to the intermarriage between Arabs and populations north and east of Arabia who generally had white skin. We will examine how the caliphs of the Abbasid dynasty in Baghdad contributed to the image of the presumptively "White" Arab race via their tradition of transferring rule to the sons of each ruler's female slave who were most times members of a White population, like Turkish, Armenian, or Greek. Then, a third—and, perhaps, most significant—factor contributing to the popular image of the White Arab archetype was the 19th century reclassification of Mediterranean peoples into a subspecies of "White."[52]

I argue throughout that the Arabs of the 7th century during the life of the Prophet Muhammad were, in fact, largely brown and black people who saw themselves to be distinct from both the "White" races of Persia, the Levant, and Europe as well as the Blacks indigenous to the African continent. Furthermore, if we were to employ the popular race taxonomy of North America to the Arabs of this time, they would qualify as "Blacks" as already underscored by Na'ūm Shuqayr in the above quote. Hence, in this chapter I designate them as "Arabian Blacks" and not "Black Arabians." An "Arabian Black" is a subspecies of black person. A "Black Arabian," on the other hand, is perceived to be an anomalous member of the Arab race, marginally identified with them. Unfortunately, this notion is misleading in that it paints the Arabs as an originally "White" or "non-Black" "non-brown" human geographic population. The foregoing seeks to prove that this viewpoint is a departure from normative conceptions and perceptions of Arabs throughout much of Islamic history.

---

[51] 'Abd Al-Raḥmān Al-Suyūṭī. *Tārīkh al-Khulafā'*, Cairo: Dār al-Fajr li al-Turāth, 2004, p. 86.

[52] Arnold J. Toynbee. *A Study of History: Abridgment of Volumes I-VI by D.C. Somervell*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1974, pp. 51-55.

What is an Arab?

According the famous legal scholar and theologian, Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyyah (728/1327), what makes a person an Arab are three fundamental characteristics: 1) they speak the Arabic language; 2) they are the children of Arab parents; and 3) they reside in the Arabian peninsula.[53] Accordingly, since the Palestinians, Syrians, and Iraqis are located in lands outside of Arabia, in spite of speaking the Arabic language, they do not qualify as true Arabs unless, of course, it can be proven that their parents originated from Arabia. Furthermore, the same can be said of "Arabs" in other places like Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Sudan, and other parts of North Africa. They are all "Arabized" peoples, not "original" Arabs.

The famed historian, Arnold J. Toynbee (1889-1975), writes that 19th century European ethnologists and others like Comte Arthur Gobineau (1816-1882), after theorizing the natural superiority of the Indo-Aryan races, proceeded to divide "Whites" into three varieties: 1) the Nordic; 2) the Alpine; and 3) the Mediterranean.[54] Consequently, Arabs were subsumed under the Mediterranean classification of White particularly in light of the fact that they birthed a great and vast civilization. It was Gobineau's contention that the true catalyst for civilization is the presence or admixture of Indo-Aryan blood in a given group of people, and that the growth and decline of civilization is commensurate with the degree of "White" blood a given group possesses. In other words, the very fact that Arabs produced a civilization "must" be the result of the Aryan blood in their veins. They, therefore, qualify as a White race or sub-race at the least.[55]

---

[53] The famous Damascene scholar, Ibn Taymiyyah (728/1327), had the following to say about Arabness and the Arabization process,

> The title 'Arab' was originally applied to a people who bore three traits: 1) their tongue was the Arabic language; 2) they were the children of Arabs; and 3) they resided in the land of the Arabs i.e. the Arabian peninsula (*jazīrah al-'arab*) which starts at the Red Sea (*baḥr al-qulzum*) to the Arabian Gulf (*bahr al-basrā*), and from the farthest stone in Yemen to the borders of the Levant (*shām*) such that Yemen falls within its borders (*dār*) but not the Levant. The Arabs resided in this territory during the advent [of the Prophet Muhammad] and prior to it.

Ahmad b. 'Abd Al-Halīm b. Taymiyyah. *Iqtiḍā' al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*, Riyadh: Maktabah al-Rushd, vol. 2/406, 411.

[54] Arnold J. Toynbee. *A Study of History: Abridgment of Volumes I-VI by D.C. Somervell*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1974, pp. 51-55.

Unlike whiteness, Arabness was easier to achieve since the criteria developed for entry into Arabness was the adoption of the Arabic language. This meant that once Arabic became one's mother tongue, Arabization was a facile process. That the popular imagery of Arabs today projects most of them as having white or European-like skin results in the impression that the true original Arabs were likewise a "fair-skinned" human variety. The reality, though, was just the opposite. The common presumption today is that brown and black skin was the exception for the historical Arabs, when in fact according to the most scrutinizing of historians, anthropologists, and philologists it was the rule.

With this in mind, it becomes anachronistic to speak of Arabs as a "White" race, especially since their own criteria for self-identification and identity were more elastic than the criteria developed by Europeans during the colonial period and into the 19th and 20th centuries. Bernard Lewis (1916-2018), says,

> Sometimes, the term "race" was used in a broader and looser sense, to denote a group of people, speaking related languages. It was in this sense that philologists and ancient historians spoke of the Semites, the Indo-Europeans, and other linguistically defined families of peoples...Though the ancient civilizations of the Middle East show considerable diversity, there is no great racial difference between their peoples...Like every other society known to human history, the ancient Middle Eastern peoples harbored all kinds of prejudices and hostilities against those whom they regarded as "other." But the "other" was primarily someone who

---

[55] According to Gobineau, "[...]Adam is the ancestor of the white race." He later declares that,

> [...]all civilizations derive from the white race, that none of can exist without its help, and that a society is great and brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it, provided that this group itself belongs to the most illustrious branch of our species.

Adrian Collins. *The Inequality of Human Races* of Arthur Gobineau, New York: G.P. Putman's Sons. 1915, p. 210.

> spoke another language (the prototypal barbarian) or professed another religion (the Gentile or heathen or—in Christian and Islamic language—infidel).[56]

In other words, if the Arabs generally identified collectively on the basis of shared language as opposed to color, what basis can there be for subsuming them under the category of Whites rather than Blacks?[57] Even if such a claim could be proven, the evidence outlined below will show that this view first promulgated in the 19th century, had more to do with prevailing perceptions in light of the fact that non-Arabian Arabs had by then achieved full inclusion into Arabness. In fact, Gobineau and the many other anthropologists writing during the European Enlightenment period collapsed together both medieval race taxonomies (Semites, Hamites) and those of the Enlightenment Era (Caucasian, Mongolian, Malayan) as can be gleaned, even, from the aforementioned quote of Dr. Bertram Thomas who argued that the original Arabs were a species of "Black."[58] Arnold Toynbee, in similar fashion to Bernard Lewis, appears to embrace Gobineau's tripart classification and proceeds to characterize Arabs as "White." In *Race & Slavery*, Lewis quotes Toynbee who explains that the Arabs referred to themselves as "swarthy" but then proceeds to imply the opposite when he says, "...the Arabs and all other White Muslims..." This results from embracing the "Mediterranean" as a species of "White" as posited by Gobineau. Lewis proceeds,

> The Arabs, that is to say, as swarthy whites, felt superior to the fairer-skinned peoples to the north of them but were entirely free from any feeling of color prejudice directed against their darker southern neighbors.

---

[56] Bernard Lewis. *Race & Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 16.

[57] Rather, one may legitimately argue as well that an identity determined by shared language and culture rather than color would necessitate that neither "black" nor "white" become an integral basis for group affiliation and identification. That notwithstanding, Arabs clearly saw themselves as distinct from the "red" (i.e. "white") Byzantines, Levantines, and Persians as well as the "black" Axumites. Rather, Arabs characterized themselves as "swarthy" people of "light brown" (*sumrah*) and "dark brown" (*udmah*). But that "brownness" was viewed as a subspecies of "black" by most scholars, as will be later clarified.

[58] Bernard Lewis. *Race & Slavery in the Middle East*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 19.

Lewis seems to ignore the possibility that the Arabs did not have that feeling of color prejudice towards the darker peoples simply because they did not consider themselves to be "White" people.

Laying this difficulty aside, what further corroborates the belief that authentic Arabness had much more to do with shared language rather than shared color—though not canonical—is the popular tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, "Whoever speaks Arabic is an Arab." Ibn Taymiyyah said of this report, "This hadith is weak. It appears to be contrived against [Imam] Mālik. Its meaning, however, is not untenable. It is, rather, correct from some respects..."[59]

> The Levantine Hanbalī scholar, Mar'ī b. Yūsuf Al-Karamī (1033/1623), said, In view of this, when the early Muslims took up residence in the lands of the Levant and Egypt where the languages of their peoples were Greek [*rūmiyyah*] and Coptic respectively, the lands of Iraq and Khurasan whose language was Persian, and the lands of Morocco [or North Africa] whose language was Berber, they accustomed the people of those lands to Arabic until it overwhelmed the inhabitants of these major centers (*amṣār*)—both the Muslims and unbelievers among them alike. Similar was the case with Khurasan of olden times who later became lax regarding the matter of the Arabic language and became accustomed to communicating in Persian until it overwhelmed them to the point that Arabic was forsaken by many of them.[60]

While many people feel disgust at the suggestion that they share a united ethnic identity with others who may resemble them phenotypically but whose historical experiences of race differ, it seems that for Arabs the ability to coalesce around a unified culture and history has been much easier. The Arabs are a people many of whom are believed to be the progeny of the patriarch, Ishmael, son of the patriarch, Abraham.[61] Abraham is universally upheld by Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike as the prototypical iconoclast and friend of God. Abraham's two eldest sons, Ishmael and Isaac, would constitute the roots of two branches of people believed to be favored most by God in all of human history: the Jews and the Arabs.

---

[59] Ahmad b. 'Abd Al-Halim b. Taymiyyah. *Iqtiḍā' al- Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm li Mukhālafah Aṣḥāb al-Jaḥīm*, Riyadh: Maktabah al-Rushd, vol. 2/411.

[60] Mar'ī b. Yūsuf Al-Karamī. *Masbūk al-Dhahab fi Faḍl al-'Arab 'alā al-'Ajam wa Sharaf al-'Ilm 'alā Sharaf al-Nasab*, Jordan: Dār 'Ammār, 1988, p. 54.

[61] 'Abd Al-Malik b. Hishām. *Al-Sīrah Al-Nabawiyyah*, Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Ma'ārif, 2004, p. 9.

Isaac, son of Abraham through his wife, Sarah, would become the father of the twelve tribes of Israel from whom the Jews would descend. Ishmael, Abraham's other son from his Egyptian concubine, Hager, would become the forefather of the Arab race according to one account, while another version of the history of Arabs assigns the source of the Arab pedigree to both Ishmael and another from Yemen by the name of Qaḥṭān[62] or his son Ya'rub b. Qaḥṭān.[63] According to Muslim historians, while Ishmael was living in the city of Mecca with his mother, a nomadic clan from southern Arabia known as Banū Jurham found their way to Mecca, and eventually offered one of their daughters in marriage to Ishmael. From the two of them, the 'Adnānī branch of the Arab race was born. Of particular interest is that Ishmael who was born to a woman of dark black complexion would marry another woman from a land known for its darker skin being that it had a history of cross-acculturation with sub-Saharan and equatorial Blacks.[64] One of the pioneer Muslim historians and prophetic biographers, 'Abd Al-Malik Ibn Hishām (218/833), ascribes the following statement to the Prophet Muhammad concerning the people of Egypt, "Be mindful of God concerning the people of the protectorate; the people of the town of the dark black skin and kinky hair (*al-sawdā' al-suḥm al-ji'*ād)! For, verily, theirs is a kinship (*nasab*) and relationship by marriage (*ṣihr*)."[65] The narrator, 'Amr, the patron of Ghufrah, goes on to explain that the kinship possessed by the people of Egypt to the Arabs is that the mother of Ishmael, the Prophet, was Egyptian, and the marriage tie was established from the fact that the Messenger of God took one of them as his concubine. Ibn Hishām also relates a report which states that the Prophet Muhammad's concubine, Māriyah, was a Coptic Egyptian.[66]

---

[62] 'Abd Al-Malik b. Hishām. *Al-Sīrah Al-Nabawiyyah*, Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Ma'ārif, 2004, p. 9.

[63] And yet another version traces the second branch of the Arab roots to Qaḥṭān himself. See Mar'ī b. Yūsuf Al-Karamī. *Masbūk al-Dhahab fī Faḍl al-'Arab*, Jordan: Dār 'Ammār, 1988, pp. 1-2.

[64] Al-Jāḥiẓ argues in his polemic against Arabs who berate the Zanj or "Negroes" for their black skin that, "Out of your ignorance, after deeming us to be compatible mates for your women in pre-Islamic times, you deemed that bad once the justice of Islam came."

'Abd Al-Salām Muhammad Hārūn. *Rasā'il Al-Jāḥiẓ*, "Fakhr al-Sūdān", Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānijī, 1964, vol. 1/195.

[65] 'Abd Al-Malik b. Hishām. *Al-Sīrah Al-Nabawiyyah li Ibn Hishām*, Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Ma'ārif, 2004, p. 8.

[66] 'Abd Al-Malik bin Hishām. *Al-Sīrah Al-Nabawiyyah li Ibn Hishām*, Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Ma'ārif, 2004, p. 9.

As centuries passed and Islam spread, the Arabs encountered many other types of people. Most often they would be Persians, Greeks, Ethiopians, and Indians. As more people entered Islam, the attraction of being considered an Arab increased. Only Arabs from the Quraysh were allowed to govern, while other Arabs could serve as ministers. Arabic was the *lingua franca*, and access to the Qur'ān and other Islamic sources could only be achieved in Arabic. The prayers and Friday sermon could only be performed in Arabic. A sound knowledge of Arabic was required to interpret scriptural content from which jurisprudence and doctrine were deduced. The language of Paradise is Arabic, and the Prophet himself was an Arab from Quraysh after all.[67] All of these facts reveal to us the many ways that non-Arabians were incentivized to become "Arabs." The attraction to Arabness was significant. And Arabization was facilitated by the mere appropriation of language and culture.

Who Did Arabs Consider "White"?

The Arabic word for the color black is *aswad*. It [and its cognates] is utilized in the Qur'ān according to its conventional application (*gharābīb sūd* Q 35:27; *al-khayṭ al-aswad* Q 2:187) as well as its figurative connotations which imply rage, regret, fear, and dismay (*ẓalla wajhuhū muswaddan* Q 16:58; Q 43:18; *wujūhum muswaddah* Q 39:60; *yawma tabyaḍḍu wujūhu wa taswaddu wujūh; fa ammā alladhīna iswaddat wujūhum* Q 3:106). In one sound tradition, the Prophet Muhammad said concerning five things that he was especially given to the exclusion of other prophets, "I have been dispatched to every red and black [person]." Yaḥyā b. Sharaf al-Al-Nawwawī (676/1278), the famous commentator on the canonical work known as *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, says of this statement,

---

[67] Ibn Taymiyyah relates that Al-Ḥākim reports in his *Mustadrak* that the Prophet Muhammad said, "I love the Arabs for three things: Because I am Arab, because the Qur'ān is Arabic, and because the discourse of the people of Paradise is Arabic." He then relates the statement of Al-Silafi, "This is a fair hadith (*ḥasan*)" and says,

> But I don't know if by the fairness of the chain (*isnād*) he means what traditionists (*muḥaddithīn*) mean when they say it or the fairness of the text (*matn*) as commonly understood amongst the populous (*iṣṭilāḥ 'āmm*). Abū al-Faraj b. al-Jawzī mentioned this hadith in *Al-Mawdū'āt* and said: "Al-Tha'labī said: "There is no source for it." Ibn Ḥibbān said: "Yaḥyā b. Yazīd relates corrupted reports (*maqlūbāt*) on the authority of trusted reporters (*athbāt*)." So, it is not a valid proof (*baṭala al-iḥtijāju bihi*).

Ahmad b. 'Abd Al-Halim b. Taymiyyah. *Iqtidā' al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqim li Mukhālafah Aṣḥāb al-Jaḥīm*, Cairo: Maktabah al-Sunnah al-Muhammadiyyah, 1950, p. 158.

> It has been said that the "red" is a reference to the non-Arab whites (*al-bīḍ min al-'ajam*), and the "black" refers to the Arabs since brownness (*sumrah*) is predominant among them and the people of the Sudan. It has also been said that the "black" refers to those of the Sudan, while the "red" is a reference to the Arabs and others. It has been said as well that the "red" are human beings, and the "black" are the sprites (*jinn*). All of these views are correct, since he was dispatched to all of them.[68]

Besides the fact that these comments reveal that scholars differ about the precise connotation of the word "black" in the hadith (to Arabs *and* those of Sudan, to the Sudanese alone, or to the *Jinn*), that discrepancy undermines very little of what we learn about the "brownness" which predominated among the Arabs. The great historian and linguist, Ibn Al-Athīr (630/1232), corroborates Al-Nawwawī's statement when he says of the hadith,

> ...the predominant colors among the non-Arabs are red (*ḥumrah*) and white (*bayād*), while the colors that predominate among the Arabs are brown (*sumrah*) and black (*udmah*).

Similar to this is the following quote by the preeminent lexicographer, Ibn Manẓūr (711/1311), who said in his *Lisān al-'Arab*,

> The reds (*al-ḥamrā'*) are a reference to the non-Arabs (*'ajam*) because of their whiteness, since extreme white complexion (*shuqrah*) is the predominant of their colors. And the Arabs would call the non-Arabs predominated by whiteness, like the Greeks (*rum*), the Persians (*furs*), and others like them, the "reds" (*al-ḥamrā'*).[69]

As for when Arabs described one another as white, it was mainly a way of extolling virtuous characteristics in the person. Ibn Manẓūr says,

> When they said, "*Fulān* or *Fulānah* is white", it was a description of their magnanimity (*karam fī al-akhlāq*), not a reference to being white in complexion (*lawn al-khilqah*). And when they said,

---

[68] Yahyā b. Sharaf al-Nawawī. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi Sharḥ al-Nawwawī*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995, vol. 3:1/4.

[69] Ibn Manẓūr al-Ifrīqī al-Miṣrī. *Lisān al-'Arab*, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1882, p. 209.

> "*Fulān* or *Fulānah* is red", they meant "white in color" (*bayāḍ al-lawn*).[70]

In those rare instances when "white" (*abyad*) was utilized to refer to the color of one's skin, it meant "the color of wheat." Hāfiz al-Dhahabī (748/1348) said in his *Siyar al-A'lām al-Nubalā'*, "Whenever Arabs said that someone was white, they meant wheat-colored (*al-ḥinṭī al-lawn*) with a black hue (*ḥilyah sawdā'*)."[71]

What prevented Arabs from characterizing those amongst them who had lighter skin than usual as "white-skinned" (*bīḍ*), was the fact that whiteness connoted an "unattractive" loss of pigmentation known as *baraṣ*. It is described as "white spots on the skin"[72] or is synonymous with the albino-like discoloration known as vitiligo. For this reason, Ibn Manẓūr says in his *Lisān al-'Arab*, "Red (*aḥmar*) means white (*abyaḍ*); [said as a way of] taking flight from the description of vitiligo (*baraṣ*)."[73]

Ḥāfiẓ al-Dhahabī said in his *Siyar*,

> The reds (*al-ḥamrā'*) according to the people of the Hejaz are the pale whites (*al-bayḍā' bi shuqrah*). But this [complexion] is rare amongst them (i.e. the Arabs). An example of this from the hadith is, "...a red man resembling one of the clients (*mawālī*)." The speaker meant that he was the color of the clients who were captured among the Christians of the Levant (Shām), Byzantium (Rūm), and the Persians (*'ajam*).[74]

The famed Arabic linguist of Kufa, Tha'lab (291/904), was asked, "Why has the word "red" (*aḥmar*) been given special treatment as opposed to the word "white" (*abyaḍ*)?" He said,

> Because the Arabs don't say that someone is white due to the whiteness of their skin. Rather, the one they consider to be white is he who is pure and free of blemish. So, whenever they mean that someone is white-skinned, they call him red (*aḥmar*).[75]

---

[70] Ibn Manẓūr al-Ifrīqī al-Miṣrī. *Lisān al-'Arab*, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1882, p. 209.

[71] Muhammad b. Aḥmad b. 'Uthmān Al-Dhahabī. *Siyar al-A'lām al-Nubalā'*, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Bayt al-Afkār al-Dawliyyah, 2004, p. vol. 1/2084.

[72] Muhammad b. Ya'qūb al-Fayrūzābādī. *Al-Qāmūs Al-Muḥīt*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995, p. 550.

[73] Ibn Manẓūr al-Ifriqī al-Misri. *Lisān al-'Arab*, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1882, p. 209.

[74] Muhammad b. Aḥmad b. 'Uthmān Al-Dhahabī. *Siyar al-A'lām al-Nubalā'*, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Bayt al-Afkār al-Dawliyyah, 2004, p. vol. 1/2084.

[75] Ibn Manẓūr al-Ifriqī al-Misrī. *Lisān al-'Arab*, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1882, p. 209.

If, indeed, it is true that Arabs deemed "whiteness" to be appropriate only as a characterization of one's noble character traits, and that the normative complexions among them were either brown or black, one is compelled to challenge the objections of those, like Ahmad al-Dardīr (1204/1786), who anathematized Muslims who classify the Prophet Muhammad as black.[76] The hadith said he was sent to the "black." If we accept that the "black" comprises both Arabians and those of the Sudan, it means that the Arabs were fine with being characterized as "black," although not as a subspecies of the Negro. And since the Prophet Muhammad was an Arab, it would follow logically that he can or "should" be included among the Blacks, not the Whites whom he characterized as "red."

Here, I must reiterate that modern Western conceptions of black as an essential part of the black-white binary can further complicate this matter insomuch that the Arabs of old conceived of themselves and the ethnic constitution of their societies somewhat differently than most living in places like the United States, France, or Great Britain today. For Arabs of the period of prophecy, society was much less sorted in ethnic terms, and racial difference would have more likely been perceived less along lines of color. An Ethiopian, Nubian, or other native African would generally have been seen as something unoriginal to Arabian society, as would have been the case with Persian or Greek residents. As we will observe, there is also ample evidence which suggests that when Arabs spoke of a "black" person, they primarily were referring to native Africans. Nevertheless, the Arabs incorporated into their ranks scores of people of Nubian, Sind, and other origins.[77] Where overlap does exist with modern American perceptions of "blackness" —at least, according to one interpretation of the aforementioned hadith—is that "black" represented a wide prism of "colored" [or non-Greek, non-Persian, and non-Syrian] peoples. Despite the spectrum of variance, practically all the "coloreds" of the Earth were incorporated into Arabness. And even the pale whites among the Syrians and other "Caucasoid" peoples of Eurasia and North Africa would eventually gain admittance into Arabness simply by the adoption of the Arabic language. That the early sensitivity about the "White" designation would dissipate in later times underlines a culture-wide ideational shift in the stigma attached to the term.

---

[76] The actual words of Al-Dardir as related in his commentary on Khalil's famous *Mukhtaṣar* are, "[Apostasy also results] if one curses him (i.e. the Prophet) or finds fault with him i.e. ascribes him to a flaw."Al-Dardīr adds, "A flaw (*‘ayb*) is the opposite of something agreeable (*mustaḥsan*) as espoused by the revealed law (*sharʿan*) or custom (*‘urfan*), equally if it relates to his physical appearance (*khalq*), like saying that he is black (*aswad*) or one-eyed (*aʿwar*); or if it relates to his conduct, like saying that he is an imbecile (*aḥmaq*), a coward (*jabān*), or stingy (*bakhīl*); or if it pertains to his commitment to faith (*dīn*), like saying that he is of little piety (*qalīl al-dīn*), one who forsakes prayer, [or] denies payment of the obligatory alms (*zakāt*)." (See Muhammad ‘Arafah Al-Dasūqī. *Ḥāshiyah al-Dasūqī ‘alā al-Sharḥ al-Kabīr*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1905, vol. 4/309). The words of Al-Dardīr suggest that the belief in the Prophet Muhammad's presumptive "whiteness" is a tenet of Muslim faith; a thing that none of the authoritative theologians ever before insisted, including scholars like, Abū Jaʿfar al- Ṭaḥāwī (d. 933), Abū al-Ḥasan al-‘Ashʿarī (d. 936), Al-Nasafī (d. 1142), and not even the controversial Ḥanbalī scholar, Ibn Taymiyyah. So anathematizing Muslims who classify the Prophet Muhammad as a member of a "black" race due to being an Arab would constitute introducing a new tenet of faith into Islam after the non-negotiable teachings have already been well established. This also shows the change in the linguistic convention of "white" in the Arab collective psyche, which originally connoted a negative trait like vitiligo. Consistency would demand that both "black" and "white" be deemed inappropriate characterizations of the Messenger of God since the early Arabs deemed the latter to be a reference to a somatic defect. Many today, also, find pale white skin to be unattractive or "disagreeable" as well. So, if subjective customs are sufficient for determining legal rulings in Islam, then the subjective sensibilities of all people need to be considered, not merely those of the Arabs of a particular time or region.

How Arabs Became White

One historical phenomenon which contributes to the idea of the systematic "whitening" of the Arab icon is that during the Abbasid dynasty in Iraq (750-1258 CE) the caliphs inaugurated a tradition of succession wherein the children of concubines inherited rule from their fathers. In other words, when we examine the pedigree of the mothers of close to fifty Abbasid caliphs, as described by Al-Suyūṭī (911/1505) in his *Tārīkh al-Khulafā'*, we observe that a great many of them were the offspring of Berber, Greek, Turkish, and Persian mothers. If it is true as the aforementioned scholars have stated that most Arabs were brown and black, it seems reasonable to assume that the skin color of children born of a "white" mother would be rendered much lighter than usual.

Of course, it can be contended that the prominence of a bright-skinned caliph does not prove that the remainder of the Arab population was simultaneously transformed over centuries of Abbasid rule. However, it does appear to be logical to surmise that since the influence of governors is often not limited to their ability to enforce societal order, the citizens, as they often do, began to self-identify as people based on both the legal and cultural standards introduced and imposed by their governing bodies. Reflect upon Ibn Khaldun's proposition that, "The conquered are infatuated with the emulation of the conqueror."[78] If that is so, it is easy to imagine lay members of Muslim society making haste to adopt the norms and aesthetic tastes of their governors, those in society with the greatest cultural and political capital. Take for example the recommendation of the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (86/705) that,

---

[77] 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī. *Tanwīr al-Ghabash*, Riyadh: Dār al-Sharīf li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', 1998, pp. 246-248.

> Whoever desires a bondswoman for sexual gratification, let him take a Berber; whoever desires one for offspring, let him take a Persian; and whoever desires one for (domestic) service, let him take a Greek.[79]

Such recommendations, if taken seriously, are bound to incentivize the populous. That these recommendations issued during the Umayyad dynasty also fuels speculation that the popularization of Persian concubinage begun before the Abbasid reign in Baghdad, allowing more time for Arab whitening to commence. This assumes, of course, that Arabized non-Arabs did not simply transfer their original self-perceptions to their new Arab identity. Otherwise, this reveals the ease by which a given person was able to acquire Arab ethno-cultural authenticity despite having a parent originally perceived of as being a non-Arab.

Some hadith compilers also give us a glimpse at this trend of Arab whitening. In one hadith, the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said while relating a dream to his companion, Abu Bakr, who was noted for his expertise in dream interpretation, "I had a vision of myself being followed by black sheep who were being followed by a flock of white sheep until the black sheep could no longer be seen." Abū Bakr reportedly said, "O God's Messenger! As for the black sheep, they are the Arabs. They will enter Islam and multiply. The white sheep are the non-Arabs. They will enter Islam until the Arabs will be no longer be recognized due to their numerousness." The Prophet reportedly said, "This is precisely the interpretation offered by the angel [Gabriel] prior to dawn."[80] This hadith is one of the clearest affirmations of presumptive non-whiteness (or blackness) of the early

---

[78] 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. Khaldun. *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldun*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1993, p. 116.

[79] Muhammad b. Bakr b. Qayyim al-Jawziyyah. *Akhbār al-Nisā'*, Beirut: Dār Maktabah al-Hayāh, 1986, pp. 11-12.

[80] Al-Suyūṭī relates this hadith from Sa'īd b. Manṣūr via Sa'īd b. al-Musayyab and Ibn Abī Laylā. See 'Abd Al-Raḥmān Al-Suyūṭī. *Tārīkh al-Khulafā'*, Cairo: Dār al-Fajr li al-Turāth, 2004, p. 86.

Arabs, and it portends the Arabization of the surrounding "White" races of Persia, the Levant, and Greece.

The Prophet's Complexion

As is known, the most important figure in Islamic history is the Prophet Muhammad. It would seem only natural to consider, among all other phenotypical characteristics, his skin color, since he was after all an Arab. For many Muslims, to question the popular notion of his putative "whiteness" at times proves to be a point of significant controversy. And often those who raise the possibility of the incorrectness of this view are looked upon by fellow Muslims as race obsessed rabble rousers who come close to, if they are not guilty of, some form of blasphemy or disparagement of his honor. That is definitely one way to view this particular challenge. It, however, is not the only possible reason for the concern for knowing his true complexion. For the many who have such a concern are far less interested in knowing his color for selfish egotistical reasons. It is out of genuine concern for maintaining historical accuracy. For if we can be wrong about one historical particular due to an aversion toward academic rigor, what other historical myths could there be flying around in the annals of Muslim folklore?

Although theologians are not in agreement that "blackness" is an unbefitting characterization of one of God's emissaries, the Qur'ān highlights that God sent a messenger to "every community." If this is true, then it follows logically that some messengers must have definitely been black. Additionally, both prophets, Moses[81] and Jesus[82], are described in certain reports as dark brown (ādam).

---

[81] Ibn Hishām reports in his *Sīrah* concerning the miraculous event known as the Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey and Ascension to Heavens (*al-Isrā' wa al-Mi'rāj*) that when he reached the sixth heaven he saw "A very dark man (*rajulun ādam*), tall, and hook-nosed resembling the men of Shanū'ah. I said to him: Who is this, Gabriel? He replied: "This is your brother, Moses, son of 'Imrān."" (See 'Abd Al-Malik b. Hishām, *Al-Sīrah Al-Nabiwiyyah*, Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Ma'ārif, 2004, p. 205). Al-Dardīr's argument not only demands that one consider it disparaging to describe the Prophet Muhammad as "black." It also necessitates disparagement toward all prophets and messengers, since it is not permissible to direct any form of diminutive description toward any of them, even implicitly, according to most Muslim theologians. And concomitant to this logic would be that all prophets and messengers may only be described as "white" since calling them "black" would be disparaging, resulting in one's apostasy.

[82] Al-Bukhārī reports the following hadith on the authority of the Prophet's companion, Ibn 'Umar, who reported that Prophet Muhammad said,

As for the color of the Prophet Muhammad himself, he has been described in the historical literature in several ways. A solitary—but widely known—report describes him as "white-skinned" (*abyad*)[83] despite the issues posed by that characterization in light of what has preceded. Other reports describe him as brownish (*asmar al-lawn*). But the most popular reports describe him as simply "bright-faced" or "bright-colored" (*azhar al-lawn*),[84] a term that some commentators, like the 16th century jurist,

---

> While I was asleep, I saw myself circumambulating the Ka'bah, when suddenly there was a man with dark brown skin (ādam) and straight hair dripping with water being supported between two men. I asked: "Who is this?" They responded: "The Son of Mary."

Muhammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Damascus, Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2002, p. 1740 Hadith #7026.

This description of Jesus contradicts that found in another hadith that both Al-Bukhari (#3394) and Muslim (#272) report on the authority of Abū Hurayrah who said that,

> The Messenger of Allah said, "On the night I was taken on the miraculous journey, I met Moses." He then described him: "He was a slender man with hair that curled at its ends. He resembled one of the men of the Shanū'ah tribe." He then said, "I also met Jesus. He was mid-height with white (*ahmar*) skin. He looked as if he had just come out of a bathhouse."

Muslim b. al-Hajjāj al-Nīsābūrī. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Riyadh: Dār Taybah, 2006, p. 92, Hadith #272.

Upon hearing this, the companion, Ibn 'Umar, objected to the description of Jesus as "white" (*ahmar*) saying,

> No! By God! The Messenger of Allah did NOT say that Jesus was white (*ahmar*). What he said was: "While I was circumambulating the Ka'ba, I suddenly saw a dark-brown man (ādam) with straight hair being supported between two men. His head was dripping with water" or "His head was pouring with water." I then said, "Who is this?" They said: "The Son of Mary." I then turned my attention in another direction and noticed a large white (*ahmar*) man, with curly hair, and a bleary right eye which looked like a protruding grape. I asked, "Who is this?" They said: "The anti-Christ (Dajjal)." The one he resembles the most is Ibn Qatan.

Muhammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Damascus, Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2002, p. 853 Hadith #3441.

[83] This is how the companion, Abū Juḥayfah, describes him in the report found in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Al-Bukhārī.

[84] Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ in his *Shifā'* attributes the version which describes the Prophet as "bright-faced" (*azhar al-lawn*) to Ali b. Abī Ṭālib, Anas b. Mālik, Abū Hurayrah,

Mullā Ali al-Qārī (d. 1605), defines as, "the brightest and most attractive form of it" (*nayyirahu wa aḥsanahu*). He continues,

> ...or it means "the whitest form of it" considering the hadith "[he was] white, imbued with redness" [*abyaḍ mushrabun ḥumratan*]. It is the most superior of the shades of white and is the meaning of "He was neither pasty white (*abyaḍ amhaq*) nor intensely dark (*ādam*)." In other words, he was bright-faced (*azhar*) which is between white and red-colored. It has been also said that *azhar* means a shade of brown (*ma qābala al-sumrah*), while white (*abyaḍ*) is something else. And the evidence for the former is the statement made by 'Āishah—God be pleased with her—that, "I used to thread the needle in the dark using the [lightness or] whiteness of God's Messenger—God's blessing and peace on him.[85]

Again, presuming that the report of 'Āishah is authentic, the foregoing should provide us with sufficient context not to confuse the Prophet's presumed "whiteness" with what is typically understood today. His whiteness was a color between white and red according to the most popular reports and most conservative explanations. Another reading would be that it was between 'wheat' and 'white' if we adopt Hāfiz al-Dhahabī's insight that "*abyad*" (white) means "wheat colored" and "*ahmar*" (red) means "white-skinned" as was the norm among Europeans, Syrians, and Persians.

In one report, the companion, Anas b. Mālik reports that he was "white imbued with redness" (*abyaḍ mushrab bi ḥumrah*). This, however, conflicts with a report by the same narrator in Al-Tirmidhi's *Jāmi'* that the Prophet was "light brown colored" (*asmar al-lawn*). He has been described also as "pearly white" and as "an ingot of silver." Both Al-Bayhaqi (458/1066) and Ibn Hajar al-Al-'Asqalani (852/1449)[86] attempt to reconcile the contradictory narrations explaining that those parts of his body which basked in the sun were brown while those unexposed to the sun were white.[87]

---

al-Barā' b. 'Āzib, 'Āishah, Ibn Abī Hālah, Abū Juḥayfah, Jābir b. Samurah, Umm Ma'bad, Ibn 'Abbās, Mu'arriḍ b. Mu'ayqīb, Abū Ṭufayl 'Āmir b. Wāthilah, Al-'Adā' b. Khālid, Khuraym b. Fātik, Ḥakīm b. Ḥizām, and others. See Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ b. Mūsā. *Al-Shifā bi Ta'rīf Ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2000, vol.1/44-45.

[85] Al-Mullā Ali Al-Qārī Al-Harawī Al-Ḥanafi. *Sharḥ al-Shifā' li al-Qādī' 'Iyāḍ*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2001, vol. 1/159.

[86] See Appendix I.

[87] Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī reconciles between a number of contradictory hadiths concerning the Prophet's skin color in his commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Ahmad b. Ali b. Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī. *Fatḥ Al-Bārī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Beirut:

Some would even say that an accurate description would be that he was like the harvest moon or wheat-colored (*ḥinṭī*) since Arab "whiteness" is more akin to the color of wheat. And we have already seen the statement of Ḥāfiẓ al-Dhahabī in his *Siyar*, "Whenever Arabs said that someone was white, they meant wheat-colored (*al-ḥinṭī al-lawn*) with a black hue (*ḥilya sawdā'*)."[88]

This understanding is also corroborated by one report which describes him as the color of "the pith of a palm tree" (*jummārah*). If accurate this would also clarify what was meant by white (if taken as a particular characterization of skin color as opposed to a character description) in the poem of the Prophet's paternal uncle, Abū Tālib, transmitted by his early biographers: "And [he is] white (i.e. wheat-colored). Rain is requested from the clouds by his face."

wa abyaḍu yustasqā al-ghamāmu bi wajhihi

وأَبيَضُ يُستَسقَى الغَمَامُ بِوَجهِهِ

Whatever the true color of the Prophet, what is clear is that his "whiteness" was not like that of the Persians, Greeks, or Syrians. The predominant colors among the Arabs were brown and black. The Prophet Muhammad's color apparently was one of the few exceptional cases which placed him in the category of those of lighter shade. Arabs may have not referred to themselves specifically as a "Black" race, but they most definitely did not refer to themselves as "White" (*aḥmar*). Na'ūm Shuqayr, however, finds no uneasiness about considering Arabs to be a subcategory of Blacks.[89] That Prophet Muhammad said he was sent to the red and black, whereas the "black" included the Arabs as suggested by commentators like Al-Nawwawī, makes Shuqayr's view feasible. One must keep in mind, however, that "black" according to this interpretation amalgamates Arabs and black Africans within a single genus. It does not necessarily mean that Arabs originate from Negroes, nor that Arabs viewed themselves as such, unless we focus specifically on the Adnānī branch from which the Prophet and like Arabs descended, since the Egyptian Hager was the mother of Ishmael. Rather, for Arabs "black" meant "black", and it was often a direct reference to equa-

---

Dār al-Manār, 1992, 6/623-624. (See Appendix I)

[88] Muhammad b. Ahmad b. 'Uthmān Al-Dhahabī. *Siyar al-A'lām al-Nubalā'*, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Bayt al-Afkār al-Dawliyyah, 2004, p. vol. 1/2084.

[89] Na'ūm Shuqayr. *Tārīkh al-Sūdān*, Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1981, p. 9.

torial and sub-Saharan East Africans. It did not include the lighter shades of "brown" today included in the social definition of American Blacks.

Theorizing the "Negro"

So, what then of these sub-Saharan peoples about whom a few Arab historians spoke negatively? Who are they if, indeed, one is convinced that Arab attacks on Blacks were *not* directed against all "Blacks"? Apparently, these references were to the Bantu speaking people of sub-Sahara known as the *Zanj*.

The *Zanj* people apparently have had a long history of conflict with other Blacks living north of them whose relationship with Arabs was in many regards more amicable. One particular history written circa 982 by an unknown author entitled, *Ḥudūd al-*'Ālam (*Limits of the World*), has the following to say about the people of the sub-Sahara,

> The people of the areas of the south are all black due to the hotness of the climate. And most of them are nude. Gold is found in their lands and towns. And they are remote from the point of human equilibrium (*ḥadd i'tidāl al-bashar*).[90]

The first group of people he showcases after these introductory words are the *Zanj* people about whom he says,

> Its inhabitants have broad faces, large physiques, and kinky hair. Their natures are as that of untamed animals, and they have intensely black skin. There is enmity between them and the people of Abyssinia and of Zābij.[91]

Interestingly, the author when speaking of the Zābij people who live to the northeast of the Zanj and the Abyssinians who live west of them does not characterize either of the two peoples as "untamed animals" as he does when describing the Zanj. It also seems that as one travels farther north, civilization grows, especially, the more one encounters Muslims. Take for example the fact that the Zābij people are "half-nude" instead of completely nude as was the case with the Zanj people. There are also "some Muslims and merchants" in Zābij, but no mention of that in the lands of the Zanj. The Abyssinians, likewise, are described as people who are "distinguished by their well-proportioned faces." And they are "Blacks who are peace-loving and have high zeal." The Abyssinians enjoyed regular trade relations with Oman, the Hejaz, and Bahrain as well.[92] And it is, perhaps, because of these considerations that the authors of most laudatory works on Blacks have much more to say about the people of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) than they do about the Zanj.

---

[90] Unknown Author. *Ḥudūd al-'Ālam min al-Sharq ilā al-Gharb*, edited by Yūsuf al-Hādi, Cairo: Al-Dār Al-Thaqāfiyyah li al-Nashr, 1999, p. 145.

[91] Unknown Author. *Ḥudūd al-'Ālam min al-Sharq ilā al-Gharb*, edited by Yūsuf al-Hādi, Cairo: Al-Dār Al-Thaqāfiyyah li al-Nashr, 1999, p. 145.

An earlier traveler, chronicler, and historian, Ali b. al-Ḥusayn al-Mas*'ūdī* (346/957), says of the Zanj, "Some of them have sharp teeth and eat one another."[93] This cannibalistic characteristic along with their lack of clothing make it far easier to caricature or stereotype the Zanj as this prototypical savage or "Negro" race.

Conclusion

What the foregoing establishes is that anti-black sentiment even for Arabs existed in a continuum organized in a complex hierarchy. When reading words intended to deride "Blacks" or to degrade their humanity one must pay careful attention to the exact words of each writer about blackness. Race is a very elusive concept which often takes centuries to crystallize through negotiation and imposition. The fact that notions of race differ so much between now and then makes it vitally important for us to review certain facts about race. We must be very careful not to conflate modern conceptions of race and color and graft them onto pre-modern and medieval civilizations, despite some degree of overlap. Race—and being labelled "black" especially—results from constructs imposed on the populous which require a certain amount of dissecting. That notwithstanding, we learn from the foregoing that while Arabs viewed themselves as culturally distinct from those indigenous to Africa, they also drew a phenotypic distinction between themselves and Persians, Romans, and Levantines. Were we to employ the color-based race taxonomy prevailing in North America and many other western territories, the original Arabs as described by medieval lexicographers and geographers could easily be classified as "Blacks." Using Gobineau's taxonomy, however, as embraced by Toynbee and Lewis, Arabs would be considered "Whites" of the Mediterranean strain. Had it not been for today's widespread presumption that Arabs are "White," a presumption reinforced by imagery promoted in Hollywood movies and similar cultural institutions in other parts of the world, there would be little reason to challenge this classification. This matters for a number of reasons. The most important is that it underscores the fact that characterizing Prophet Muhammad as either "White"—or "Black"—distorts his proper description, that of most of his companions, and that of other Arabs during their time. And, if viewed through the prevailing color taxonomy (black, white, red, yellow, brown), accusations of apostasy due to characterizing the Prophet as "black" rely on a weak justification if one accepts that Arabs are a species of "Blacks" as suggested by Na'ūm Shuqayr in his *History of the Blacks* (*Tārīkh al-Sūdān*). This view also finds support from Al-Jāḥiẓ as we will come to see in a later chapter.

---

[92] Unknown Author, *Ḥudūd al-'Ālam min al-Sharq ilā al-Gharb*, edited by Yūsuf al-Hādi (Cairo: Al-Dār Al-Thaqāfiyyah li al-Nashr, 1999), 146.

[93] Ali b. al-Ḥusayn Al-Mas'ūdī. *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma'ādin al-Jawhar*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1973, vol. 2/6.

CHAPTER 2

The Maliki School and Race

Many find the Sharī'ah threatening because they view it as a mere penal code that authorizes the severing of hands for theft and stoning for adultery. The fact that Muslim fanatics delegitimize Muslim governments that neglect to implement these penalties further increases consternation about Sharī'ah. At the root of anti-Sharī'ah hysteria is ignorance, and that ignorance is to be found among Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Since so many Muslims themselves are unclear about what exactly the Sharī'ah is, it is not surprising that non-Muslims suffer similar confusion.

Sharī'ah is fundamentally the moral code introduced by the Prophet Muhammad of Arabia over 1400 years ago. It is the law as revealed to him by God (Allah). Since not every law is clear, scholarly interpretation has augmented and expanded the meaning of Sharī'ah to include the jurisprudence codified and preserved in various legal schools. In the Sunni tradition there are four dominant legal schools or schools of thought: the Hanafi School, the Māliki School, the Shāfi'ī School, and the Hanbalī School. With the patronage of dynastic rule over the centuries, these schools crystalized and became preeminent, especially once appropriated by the local rulers. Consequently, cultures formed surrounding the teachings of each school in the various regions of Muslim social interaction.

Having studied in North Africa in the country of Morocco, I have received considerable grounding in the Mālikī School of law since it is the official school of the Kingdom and most Muslim countries in North and West Africa. My search for similar disparaging remarks about Blacks among scholars of other legal schools, however, has been more challenging. Is it because other schools were encountering largely non-black cultures during their spread, while the Mālikī School flourished in areas predominated by

Blacks? Or was the derogatoriness of "blackness" a presumption so culturally pervasive that there was no need to make mention thereof?

The great scholar from the successor generation Sufyan al-Thawri (161/778) would jokingly remark of himself after giving in to the urge for sweets, "Feed the Negro his child."[94] The "Negro" was an apparent metaphor for his appetite while "his child" referred to the sweets he had just eaten, reinforcing the reputation for cannibalism among the Zanj spoken of in early Arab travel logs. The famed exegete Ibn Kathīr remarked "…A believing man, even if he happens to be an Abyssinian slave, is much better than an idolater, even if he happens to be commander of a body of troops (*ra'īsan sariyyan*)."[95] This was in direct response to Q 2:221 which states that "a bondsman who believes is better" for a believing woman to marry "than an idolatrous man, even one who pleases you." That he would extend the meaning of "bondsman" or "slave" to "an Abyssinian man" underscores the low social and aesthetic esteem afforded to Abyssinians in the view of Ibn Kathīr. It further suggests, as with certain scholars discussed in this book, that the word "slave" connoted a person with black or dark brown skin, especially in the minds of non-blacks.

For whatever reasons there may be, we find that most black Africans follow the Mālikī School, and one might reasonably assume that Africans [or any people for that matter] would steer clear of a school whose doctrines explicitly endorse an inferior role and consideration for the black African. I do not think I need to speak more of the paradox of this situation. An ample number of anti-black prophetic hadiths—though largely deemed apocryphal—exist, despite the difficulty in identifying similar patterns in the Hanafī, Shāfiʿī, and Hanbalī Schools.

---

[94] 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī. *Al- Ṭibb Al-Rūhānī*. Cairo: Maktabah al-Thaqāfah al-Dīniyyah, 1986, p. 58. As we believe the cannibalistic Zanj to be the source of stereotypes associated with the word "Nigger," this could also be translated as "Feed the Nigger his child" (*at' im al-zanjiyya waladahu*). I believe the above translation of this quote to be accurate, although another possibility is "The Negro fed his child" (*at' ama al-zinjiyyu waladahu*) in which case "his child" would mean Al-Thawrī's appetite and "The Negro" would be a reference to himself. But why would a man from Kufa in Iraq refer to himself as a Negro when none of his biographers describe him as one? Wouldn't such a statement be equally disparaging to the Zanj being that it suggests them to be gluttonous in accord with the apocryphal hadith, "The Negro belongs to his stomach and genitals." Of course, it is possible that Al-Thawrī considered this hadith to be authentic and was led to berate himself as a Negro due to his inability to resist sweets. Another but less plausible reading of the hadith would be "The Negro's child fed him" (*at' ama al-zinjiyya waladuhu*).

[95] Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl b. Kathīr. *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, Beirut: Mu'assassah al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 1996, vol. 1/245.

Beyond phenotypic differences and similarities between various peoples, 'race' exists not as a term of essential biological distinction, but one used to express a sociological phenomenon. The particular phenomenon under question is that of "group identity" and how it is formed vis-à-vis the "other." Premodern societies were very insular and were largely defined by their shared languages, customs, and beliefs. Xenophobia was common and directed towards all outsiders unless by a certain shared principle the outsider could achieve incorporation into the group. For Arabs, for instance, being born to an Arab father or acquiring fluency in the Arabic language and Arab custom made the Arabization process easy for non-Arabians. In other words, it was not color or shared phenotypic characteristics which determined authentic Arabness as perceived by many modern people. In later times, however, with the onset of the European Enlightenment and modernity, group identity started to be determined primarily by phenotypic differences, like color, hair texture, and the shape of the nose and lips.[96] This is not to suggest that premodern peoples did not have some minimalistic conception of "race"-types. For, they surely were familiar with the Noachian doctrine which alleged that all of earth's living inhabitants were the offspring of one of Noah's three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.[97] No one can be certain, but perhaps a recollection of the doctrine of humanity's shared Adamic roots helped obviate the development of any significant early color-based prejudice.

If we can view 'race' as this process of group identity formation, it would mean that it is far more an 'experience' rather than an expression of genetic uniformity. This is precisely the way that many anthropologists and contemporary scientists view race; as a largely sociological phenomenon rather than a biological fact.[98]

---

[96] Chapter 8 on Race Taxonomies offers greater detail on this topic.

[97] A discussion of this doctrine as understood by Muslim exegetes is forthcoming in Chapter 6.

[98] According to Ashley Montague (d. 1999),

> The development of the idea of race may clearly be traced from scholastic naturalization of Aristotle's doctrine of the Predicables of Genus, Species, Difference, Property and Accident…Buffon recognized that all human beings belonged to a single species, as did Linneaus, and he considered it merely "convenient", and I emphasize the word convenient, as did Blumenbach after him, to distinguish between certain geographic groups of man. Thus, at the very outset the term was understood to be purely arbitrary and a simple convenience.

The premodern experience of race allowed for greater inclusion of people of diverse phenotypes than the modern experience in the Western world, which places enormous emphasis on skin color. This would make "blackness" and "whiteness", according to this conception of race as group identities formed in the crucible of the collective/shared experiences of a people vis-à-vis others, nothing more than illusory and mere "convenient" classifications. Even the Arab perception of ethnic purity as they delighted in the knowledge of their paternal roots and ancestral achievements was derided by Ibn Khaldun, who said, "Lineage is an illusory matter which has no reality."[99]

The boundaries of both "blackness" and "whiteness" have shifted from time and place in the past, and today not very much has changed in that regard.[100] What has remained consistent for millennia, however, is the disdain for dark skin. According to certain linguists, in practically every language there exists metaphors of "black" negative and "white" positive.[101] The etiology of this linguistic phenomenon is difficult to determine, but there appears to be a perennial disdain for "blackness" and dark/er skin more generally. Is this problem particular to a certain ethnic demographic or is it a more general human challenge? I believe the problem is a ubiquitous one. I have chosen, however, to focus in this chapter on one manifestation of this in the Muslim tradition: That is the Mālikī School and the larger Islamic tradition.

It may seem unfair to speak of "bigoted" or "errant" Muslims in Islamic history, since every religious group has examples of anomalous personalities whose views do not represent the ideal or orthodox expression of that religion. So, a good question would be, why focus on the exception rather than underscore the rule? Or what practical benefit could come from speaking about matters buried away deep in the Islamic tradition?

The answers to these questions relate to the very fact that the psycho-emotional state of many Blacks was adversely affected by popular notions of black "ugliness" and "undesirability." A number of Muslim traditionists relate the story of an Abyssinian man who once said to Prophet

---

Ashley Montagu. *The Concept of Race in the Light of Genetics*, London: The Free Press of Glencoe Collier-Macmillan, 1964, p. 2.

[99] 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. Khaldun. *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldun*, Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1993, p. 102.

[100] Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 14.

[101] David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 3.

Muhammad, "You all have been given favor over us in color and prophethood. Do you think that if I believe as you do and work as you have that I will be with you in Paradise?"[102] The Prophet consoled the man, answering his question in the affirmative. But what is most interesting about this question is that he appeared to believe that the same God who gave him his black skin might hold it against him thereby preventing him from entering Heaven. It is as if he felt that having black skin was a curse. This shows that Africans very early in Islamic history suffered insecurity about their skin color.

In a forthcoming chapter, we will examine a number of statements alleged to have issued from the mouth of the Prophet himself which disparage Blacks and cast them as hedonistic,[103] poverty-prone,[104] dysmorphic and unsuited for marriage to non-Blacks.[105] Even though the famed Hanbali jurists, ʿAbd Al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī (597/1201) and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (751/1350), declared all hadiths disparaging of Blacks to be spurious, our concern with them relates to the question of whether or not those reports had any real-life ramifications on Africans living in non-African society and the opinions developed by non-Africans toward them.

The fact that three different scholars (Al-Jāḥiẓ, Ibn al-Jawzī, and Suyūṭī) three centuries apart (9th, 12th, and 15th) from one another from two major regions (Iraq and Egypt) of the Muslim world deemed it necessary to write books as a vindication of "black" worth and virtue, corroborates the assertion of transhistorical black antipathy in those territories if not the greater Muslim empire. This is especially significant when we consider the catalyst mentioned by the Iraqi polymath, Ibn al-Jawzī, for writing *Tanwīr al-Ghabash* on the topic was that he encountered "a group of respectable Ethiopians distraught over the blackness of their skin. So, I told them that consideration is given to beautiful acts, not to beautiful forms."[106]

Disdain for black skin in general and the African phenotype more specifically can be found in Islamic literature beginning with Prophet Muhammad's own lifetime and in succeeding generations down to the present. The forthcoming will show just how ubiquitous this ethnic sentiment was. That, however, is not meant to give the impression that ethnic disdain moved only in one direction (from non-Blacks toward Blacks). For, Blacks themselves, as was the norm of the premodern world, likewise entertained disdain toward non-Blacks, including against Arabs and other Blacks as well. This book attempts to showcase black antipathy in the Islamic tradition rather than racism, even though antipathy is a precondition for racism. For that reason, a large part of the discussion concerns race and its many conceptions.

---

[102] ʿAbd Al-Rahman b. al-Jawzī. *Tanwīr al-Ghabash fī Faḍl al-Sūdān wa al-Ḥabash*, Riyadh: Dār al-Sharīf, 1998, pp. 145-146.

[103] Muhammad b. ʿAbd Al-Raḥmān Al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Maqāṣid Al-Ḥasanah fī Bayān Kathīr min Al-Aḥādīth Al-Mushtahirah ʿalā Al-Alsinah*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1979, pp. 111-112.

[104] Al-Albānī, *Silsilah al-Aḥādīth al-Ḍaʿīfah*, Riyadh: Maktabah al-Maʿārif, 1992, pp. 157-158.

[105] Ahmad b. ʿAbd Allah Abū Nuʿaym Al-Aṣbahānī, *Kitāb Tārīk Aṣbahān: Dhikr Akhbār Aṣbahān*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1990, vol. 1/369-370.

[106] ʿAbd Al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī. *Tanwīr al-Ghabash fī Faḍl al-Sūdān wa al-Ḥabash*, Riyadh: Dār al-Sharīf, 1998, p. 29.

The Mālikī School is one of four surviving Sunni legal schools, which originally split into four sectors (Medina, Egypt, Iraq, Maghrib including Andalus) after the death of its 8th century eponym, Mālik b. Anas (179/796). Mālik was known as "the" scholar of Medina to whom students and scholars from the surrounding metropolises and towns would travel to earn the privilege of his tutelage. In light of a very long career in teaching, a number of his foreign students upon returning to their homelands would possess conflicting reports concerning his views on a number of issues. Consequently, representation of his actual views would at times be difficult to ascertain. For most Mālikī scholars, however, wherever discrepancies persisted, the most authoritative views would be those of Egypt, and most importantly, what was transmitted by his senior student, 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. al-Qāsim (191/806).[107]

Certain Egyptian Sufi scholars of Azhar University during the centuries of the European Enlightenment are extremely important for the current discussion. That they lived during this period is not meant to imply that this was the very first time in Muslim history wherein negativity about black skin color or nature were ever heard. For we will see that black antipathy found its way into the general Muslim tradition as well as others. The point is, rather, that from among the many Mālikī jurists and theologians, it appears that there issues from these scholars some of the most explicit devaluations of "Blacks" or the "Negro."

Aḥmad b. Muhammad al-Ṣāwī (1241/1825) suggests a transhistorical presumption of black or "brown" being the default color of slaves.[108] The Mālikī Sufi scholar Ibrāhīm b. Mar'ī al-Shubrakhītī (1106/1694) reduces "beauty" and "ugliness" of people to the single factors of either "whiteness" or "blackness" of skin tone.[109] And, regarding the rights of marriage guardians for women, major jurists of the Mālikī School legitimize a double standard for the "ignoble" (*daniyyah*) (read "black") women, thereby denying the said woman the protections given to a woman of "noble" (*sharīfah*) status"[110]—a situation which results in hindering her clansmen from being able to safeguard her from the potential harms of suitors of whom they disapprove. The justificatory logic of the said jurists is that the "black" and/or "ignoble" woman is "undesirable" (*ghayru marghūb fīhā*). She is, therefore, without value (*lā khaṭara lahā*) and compatible with "any" male suitor.

---

[107] 'Abd Allah b. Mahfūz b. Bayyah. *Sinā'ah al-Fatwā wa Fiqh al-Aqalliyāt*, Beirut: Dār al-Minhāj, 2007, pp. 104-106.

[108] Ahmad b. Muhammad Al-Ṣāwī. *Kitāb sharḥ al-Ṣāwī 'alā Jawharah al-Tawḥīd*, Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2009, p. 278.

[109] Ibrāhīm b. Mar'ī Al-Shubrakhītī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Wahabiyyah bi sharḥi*

It must be understood, though, that the "black" woman is only one from a general class of women deemed to be undesirable in marriage. Undesirability results from lacking beauty, wealth, pedigree (*nasab*), or celebrated roots (*ḥasab*), as when one's father was known for piety (*salāh*) and magnanimity (*karam*).[111] Mālikī scholars include in this category the manumit (*mu'taqah*) and the unappealing non-Arab convert (*musalmāniyyah*). The point of singling out the "black" woman in this discussion is merely to highlight how her undesirability in the school is determined according to the leading authorities by the single factor of color unlike the other women. Why not underscore the presumed "whiteness" of the *musalmāniyyah*, and make that a sufficient basis for undesirability or ugliness as was the case with the "black" woman?

Due to the aforesaid bases of undesirability, the normal order of priority given to marriage guardians may be bypassed, and even a non-relative guardian may perform her marriage in the presence of a blood relative. On the other hand, several Mālikīs challenge this rule, insisting that no distinction should be made between a *sharīfah* (noble) and *daniyyah* (ignoble) regarding the matter of guardianship.[112] So, not all Mālikīs endorse this bias.

My contention in this chapter is that these scholars and others who will be showcased below, being products of their times and climes, seemed to have overlooked that their personal views on beauty were shaped by their own sociohistorical contexts. The "undesirability" of a woman or man of a certain phenotype living in a land predominated by people of a different

---

arba'īna ḥadīthan al-Nawwawiyah, Egypt: Sharikah Maktabah wa Maṭba'ah Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Awlāduhu bi Miṣr, 1955, p. 288.

[110] Abū 'Umar Yūsuf b. 'Abd Allāh b. Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Barr Al-Qurṭubī, Al-*Kāfī fī Fiqh Ahl al-Madīnah al-Mālikī*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1992, 234-235.

[111] Muhammad 'Arafah Al-Dasūqī, *Ḥāshiyah al-Dasūqī 'alā al-Sharḥ al-Kabīr*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1905, 2/226.

[112] The Mauritania jurist Ahmad al-Shinqītī is an example of one of several Mālikī jurists who challenged this distinction. Ahmad b. Ahmad al-Mukhtār al-Shinqītī. *Mawāhib al-Jalīl min Adillah Khalīl*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2005, vol. 3/33.

phenotype often leads to confusion over what it means to be naturally or subjectively beautiful. While jurists often account for such cultural distinctions, the scholars under question apparently did not.

Islam reached Africa through the east via the Indian Ocean and north via the Sahara Desert. From Egypt expansion flowed in three directions: eastward along the coast, southward into the Sudan, and westward into the Maghrib. There were both Coptic and Nubian Christians in Egypt when the first Muslims arrived, but by the fifteenth century, after 3 centuries of exposure to Islam, the Coptic population had been reduced to approximately 15%, and the Nubian Christians steadily lost ground in their resistance to the spread of Islam between the 12th and 14th centuries after six centuries of Muslim expansion. Ethiopia, in the Horn of Africa, remained impenetrable to Muslim influence, barring Muslims from holding political office. The Ibadis, who were established in Eastern Arabia during the first centuries of Islam, were the first to reach Sudan, having arrived there as early as the eighth and ninth centuries. But by the 11th century, the Mālikīs overturned that influence and predominated in North and West Africa. The Ibadis, however, maintained an ideological foothold on Zanzibar since the Omani colonization of the country during the 18th century.[113]

That most "black" African Muslims of the north and west today pride themselves on embracing the Mālikī legacy gives pause as to why and how it was possible for them to adopt a legal school which, seemingly, espouses a discriminatory policy in marriage and among whose scholarly authorities there are those who look upon "Blacks" with great disdain? Is it simply due to a lack of knowledge of such laws? Is it because such Africans are aware that these references are directed against a specific kind of "black" person? Or, maybe, it was simply because black Africans knew that Arab "factual" assessments did not apply to their societies. Whatever the case may be, that so many black Africans have remained Mālikīs, seeing adherence to the school's directives as overall unproblematic, bears testimony to the fact to the school's legal dynamism and/or the incredible forbearance and magnanimity of Africans. And, as we will later see, the Muslim legal schools have constantly calibrated its rulings to new facts and circumstances as when certain Mālikī scholars from Mauritania, Sudan, and elsewhere question whether "blackness" alone is sufficient reason for considering a "black" woman to be a member of the "ignoble" category.

The 11th century Iraqi judge of the Mālikī School, 'Abd Al-Wahhāb al-Baghdādī (d. 422/1031), said in his *'Uyūn al-Majālis,*

---

[113] Nehemia Levtzion and Randall L. Powels. *The History of Islam in Africa*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000, pp. 1-2.

> It is permitted to marry off an 'Alawī, 'Abbāsī, and Qurashī woman, i.e. any woman of noble lineage, to a guardian or another one of the Muslims, because the compatible mate in our view is the devout Muslim. And that is the same if the guardians all consent to it or differ about it. For if she permits for herself to be given in marriage and is satisfied, none of the guardians have a right to object to her concerning that. Abū Ḥanīfah and Shāfi'ī—God show them both mercy—said, though, that only if she and all the guardians are satisfied is it valid. And if all of them object but she alone is satisfied, it is not valid. And if all the guardians are satisfied but she objects, it is also not valid. And if she and all the guardians except for one are satisfied, he has the right to annul it. There is a statement of Shāfi'īs—God show him mercy—where he said that "It will be annulled concerning himself." And there are some people who say that even if she and all of the guardians are satisfied, it is not valid, because the dishonor even enters upon all of those of kin (*munāsibīn*) who have yet to be born (*wa la'allahu an yūjada fī man ya'tī*), because compatibility and the removal of dishonor from her and the guardians is not a sole right of theirs to the exclusion of those who will come after them.[114]

When it comes to the matter of interclass marriage in Islam, the Mālikī School happens to be one of the most egalitarian with respect to the conditions of compatibility between potential mates. Neither race nor caste has a bearing on the lawfulness of marriage between people identified as belonging to two different ethnicities. Rather, the mere fact that the two people share the same religion (Islam) suffices as a condition for compatibility. That notwithstanding, Mālikīs, like the members of others legal schools, do make a class distinction between women who are desired because of their relative beauty, wealth, or nobility, and others who are deemed by most men in Arab society to be undesirable due to qualities like relative unattractiveness, poverty, and uncelebrated roots. The first category of woman is called the '*sharīfah*' or 'noble.' The latter is referred to as the '*daniyyah*' or 'ignoble.'

Unlike the customs in traditional societies, the Mālikī School places no obligation upon a *sharīfah* to perform household chores or to suckle her infant child unless the child accepts only her milk. Rather, it is the obligation of the husband to furnish a maid for the home to cook meals and clean,[115] and to provide payment to a wet nurse to suckle the child unless he is not affluent. [116] The *sharīfah* is of many grades; the highest of which is a woman who is a direct descendent of the Prophet Muhammad, followed by a member of the clan of Banū Hāshim, and then one who is a member of the tribe of Quraysh. Since 'Alawīs/Alawids (the descendants of the prophet's cousin 'Ali b. Abī Ṭālib—the most revered of all the Shiite Imams) are members of Banū Hāshim as well as the 'Abbāsīs/'Abbāsids (the descendants of the paternal uncle of the prophet, 'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib), women who are members of the two clans are given the default noble designation, *sharīfah*.

---

[114] 'Abd Al-Wahhāb b. Ali b. Naṣr Al-Baghdādī. *'Uyūn al-Majālis*, Riyadh: Maktabah al-Rushd, 2000, vol. 3/1058-1060.

On the other hand, the quote reveals that in the Ḥanafī and Shāfi'ī legal schools the designation of *sharīfah* is much more nuanced than it is in the Mālikī School. In particular, the "dignified" or "noble" designation serves as a basis for barring intermarriage between members of the tribe of Quraysh in general and non-members, be they Arabs or non-Arabs. This prohibition is even more specific when it comes to attempts to marrying into the Prophet's own family, like those who are members of the 'Alawid or 'Abbāsid clans. Then because of the high desirability of the *sharīfah* in Arab society, instead of her status leading to greater agency to marry whomever she pleases, it is circumscribed as a mark of the preciousness of her value.

'Abd Allah b. Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (d. 996), the Tunisian scholar known as "Little Mālik", speaking about marriage guardianship rules said,

> A woman is not to be married without the permission of her guardian, an elder authority from her family, or the sultan, such as a man from her tribe. There is disagreement, though, about the ignoble woman regarding whether she may assign a non-relative as her guardian.[117]

Ali Abū al-Ḥasan (939/1532), the famous 16th century Egyptian commentator on Ibn Abī Zayd's *Risālah*, says about the statement that, "There is disagreement, though, about the ignoble woman..."

> She is the one who is not desired due to a lack of beauty, wealth, pedigree, or celebrated roots, such as the poor black woman, the

---

[115] Abū al-Walīd b. Rushd Al-Andalusī. *Bidāyah al-Mujtahid wa Nihāyah al-Muqtaṣid*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997, vol. 2/95.

[116] Qāḍī Abū Bakr Muhammad b. Al-'Al-Rabi'. *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, Mecca: Maktabah Dār al-Bāzz, 1996, vol. 1/272-276.

[117] 'Abd Allāh b. Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī. *Matn al-Risālah li Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1996, p. 80.

> unappealing non-Arab woman (*musalmāniyyah*),[118] or the one who begs outside of [peoples'] homes..."[119]In an attempt to mitigate any potential distastefulness from this declaration, 'Ali al-Ṣa'īdī al-'Adawī, an Egyptian scholar known for his supercommentary on the *Risālah*, says in response,
>
> His saying: "such as the [poor] black woman, etc. is mentioned as an example [only]. It is not a reference to every black woman. Rather, the intent is if she happens to be from a people among the Copts who come from Egypt into Medina who happen to be black, as Mālik stated. Then, it was more appropriate for the commentator to drop the word "poor" [from "poor black woman"]. Consequently, all of this means, as one of the commentators on *Khalīl* has stated, that, "Any [woman] who is desired because of one of those aforementioned characteristics is considered to be of noble status (*sharīfah*), and the unappealing non-Arab is of ignoble status regardless of her description. The same goes for the black woman and the manumit."[120]

It is interesting that Al-'Adawī would attempt to deflect potential accusations of essentializing or promoting stereotypes about the presumptive "ugliness" of black women, when it could be argued on the basis of the reports mentioned by the historian, Ibn Hishām, that Hager, the mother of Prophet Ishmael, was a black African woman from the area of the Copts. I think it is worth noting as well that the earlier commentators and jurists were less apologetic about describing the black woman as being a member of a lowly or ignoble class, while scholars writing closer to the common era seem to be more sensitive to the subjectivity of this judgment, although they seem to endeavor to maintain the ancient view on black women in one form or another. Also worthy of note is that if "black" Coptic women are ignoble, this would mean that Hager, the foremother of the Adnani branch of Arabs (and all Arabs according to one account) including Prophet

---

[118] According to Al-Dasūqi, the *musalmāniyyah* is the woman who is generally undesirable due to a lack of noble status, wealth, or beauty. See Muhammad 'Arafah Al-Dasūqī. *Ḥāshiyah al-Dasūqī 'alā al-Sharḥ al-Kabīr*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1905, vol. 2/226.

[119] 'Alī Al-Sa'īdī Al-'Adawī. *Hashiyah al-'Adawī 'alā Sharḥ Abī al- Ḥasan al-Musammā Kifāyah al-Ṭālib al-Rabbānī li Risālah ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī*, Casablanca: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1998, vol. 2/46.

[120] Ali Al-Sa'īdī Al-'Adawī. *Hashiyah al-'Adawī 'alā Sharḥ Abī al-Ḥasan*, Casablanca: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1998, vol. 2/40-41.

Muhammad, was also ignoble and undesirable. Such a suggestion would be blasphemous according to many theologians, many of the same who anathematize Muslims for referring to the Prophet as a "black" man.

What is even more revealing about the citation is that it appears that the source of this view of "black" women is the school's eponym, Mālik himself. At least, this is what Al-'Adawi's statement implies when he says, "Rather, the intent is if she happens to be from a people among the Copts who come from Egypt into Medina who happen to be black, as Mālik stated."[121]

I have, personally, failed to locate an explicit quote from Imām Mālik on this matter. I did, however, find the following quote from Saḥnūn (240/854) who reports in *Al-Mudawwanah*,

> I said [to Ibn al-Qāsim]: What do you think about a formerly married woman *(thayyib)* who appoints over herself a man to undertake the role of marriage guardian? He said: "Mālik said: "As for the manumit (*mu'taqah*), unappealing non-Arab (*musālamah*), and the indigent woman who lives in the town that has no governor—and there are many towns without governors—who then consigns her affair to a [non-related] man, there is no harm in his state." Or if it happens in a place over which there is a governor, but she happens to be ignoble (*daniyyah*), having no major value as I have described to you, Mālik said, "There is nothing wrong with her appointing over herself one who will marry her off. And that is permitted."[122]

Again, in this quote there is no confirmation from Mālik of the assertion made by Al-'Adawi that the "ignoble woman" (*daniyyah*) is a reference to "a people among the Copts who come from Egypt into Medina who happen to be black." Perhaps, the quote exists in another Mālikī source. As for now, besides entertaining the likelihood of insufficient research, I can only assume for the time being that Al-'Adawi has grafted this meaning unto the text. Consequently, we are to presume that this interpretation starts with those who came after Mālik.

In a quote that gives deeper insight into what is intended by a woman of lowly or ignoble caste (*daniyyah*), the 11th century Andalusian scholar known as Ibn 'Abd Al-Barr (463/1071) said,

---

[121] 'Alī al-Sa'īdī Al-'Adawī. *Ḥāshiyah al-'Adawī 'alā sharḥ Abī al-Ḥasan*, Casablanca: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1998, vol. 2/40-41.

[122] Saḥnūn b. Sa'īd Al-Tanūkhī. *Al-Mudawwanah Al-Kubrā*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1998, vol. 2/912.

> When a non-guardian marries off a woman with her permission and she is of a noble caste (*sharīfah*), having a [valued] status among the people, her [blood] guardian has the prerogative to annul the marriage or to authorize it. But if she is from an ignoble caste (*daniyyah*), like a manumit, a black woman, unappealing non-Arab,[123] and any who does not have a [valued] status with the people, it is permitted to marry her off [without qualification]. And the [blood] guardian has no prerogative [to annul the marriage], because any man is compatible with her. It has been related from Mālik that both the noble and the ignoble woman are to be married by either her blood guardian or the governor (sultan). It has also been related that he said that every woman controls her own affair whenever she places herself in the custody of a compatible mate while being a non-virgin (*thayyib*). In such an instance, the governor is to order her [blood] guardian to marry her off. And if he refuses, the governor is to marry her off. In this regard, the following hadith has come, "Verily, she has more right to herself than her [blood] guardian." And whenever a [blood] guardian marries off a woman without her permission and then she acquires knowledge of it and authorizes it soon thereafter, it is valid. Otherwise, it is not permissible.[124]

In the above quote, Ibn 'Abd Al-Barr is explicit about the intent of the "ignoble" woman being a reference to "…a manumit, a black woman, an unappealing non-Arab, and any who does not have a [valued] status with the people." I think we can assume that "the people" in "with the people" is a reference to "Arab" men, being that black women would have likely been an oddity in Ibn 'Abd Al-Barr's hometown of Cordova in the 11th century. Again, the aim is not to make it seem as if "black" women alone were considered undesirable. The point is that among the "undesirables" only the "black" woman is singled out because of her color.

---

[123] The Prophet Muhammad in a sound tradition mentioned that there are four basic reasons that a woman is sought out in marriage: because of her wealth, beauty, her roots, and her moral uprightness. Although all four are valid reasons to marry, the Prophet Muhammad highly encouraged men to marry women who were morally upright. (Muhammad Ashraf b. Amīr Al-'Azīmābādī. *'Awn al-Ma'būd 'alā Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, Amman, Jordan: Bayt al-Afkār al-Dawliyyah, p. 908, hadith #2046 from Sunan Abī Dāwūd). Mālikīs build their definition of "noble" and "ignoble" women on this prophetic tradition, whereas generally any woman found to possess the characteristics of beauty, wealth, and celebrated roots is declared to be "noble" (*sharīfah*). While the ignoble (*daniyyah*) is generally the opposite.

[124] Abū 'Umar Yūsuf b. 'Abd Allāh b. Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Barr Al-Qurṭubī. *Al-Kāfi fi Fiqh Ahl al-Madīnah al-Māliki*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1992, pp. 234-235.

We find more vehement repudiations of this characterization and ruling among contemporary scholars. For example, the 20th century Mauritanian scholar Aḥmad b. Aḥmad al-Mukhtār al-Shinqīṭī (1434/2013) says in his *Mawāhib al-Jalīl* quoting Khalīl b. Isḥāq (767/1374),

> And it (the initiation of a marriage) is valid in such form regarding one of ignoble caste with a blood guardian who cannot compel [into marriage].[125]

Al- Shinqīṭī says,

> In my view, if he had said: "And it is valid in such form with a blood guardian" it would have been more fitting, because guardianship of believing women is an undifferentiated matter (*min bāb wāḥid*). And his saying—God's blessing and peace on him—has already preceded that "The Muslims, their blood is of equal stock." So, there is no basis for the differentiation in guardianship between the woman of noble status and the one of ignoble status. Then had he not differentiated, his statement would have possessed a portion of proof in light of Allah's saying, High is He, "The believers, men and women, are guardians of one another."[126]

Another 20th century Mālikī scholar Sāliḥ 'Abd Al-Samī' al-Azharī says the following when commenting on the words of Khalīl,

> His use of the expression: "It is valid" indicates that it (guardianship by a non-relative) is not permitted for one to undertake as a principle. Al-Ḥaṭṭāb states: "The initiation of such is disliked (*yukrahu*)." [According to] Banānī: "The ruling of permissibility is what is articulated by *Al-Mudawwanah*, Ibn Fatūḥ, Ibn 'Arafah, and others.[127]

---

125 Ahmad b. Ahmad al-Mukhtār Al-Shinqīṭī. *Mawāhib al-Jalīl min Adillah Khalīl*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2005, vol. 3/33.

126 Ahmad b. Ahmad al-Mukhtār Al-Shinqīṭī. *Mawāhib al-Jalīl min Adillah Khalīl*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2005, vol. 3/33.

127 Ṣāliḥ 'Abd Al-Samī' Al-Ābī. *Jawāhir al-Iklīl Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar al-'Allāmah al-Shaykh Khalīl*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997, vol. 1/392.

Then, finally, the Sudanese Mālikī jurist 'Uthmān b. Ḥusayn Barrī had the following to say about the statement of Muhammad al-Bashshār in his *Ashal al-Masālik*,

> And a non-relative [can be a guardian] in the presence of a blood guardian—for a [woman of an] ignoble caste (*daniyyah*), [but] not for those [women] of a noble caste (*sharaf*).[128]

'Uthmān follows,

> In other words, the marriage contract is valid under the guardianship of an unrelated man over an ignoble woman, even if her specific blood guardian is living, such as a father, brother, or another, considering her unattractiveness (*danā'atihā*). The ignoble woman (*daniyyah*) is one who is destitute and offers her services for hire through grounding flour (*ṭaḥn*) and cooking (*ṭabkh*) for her livelihood, and is not among those who possess beauty, celebrated roots (*ḥasab*), and pedigree (*nasab*). And this is irrespective of if she is white or black, especially in the lands of the Sudan, since "blackness" —the characteristic constituting the *ratio legis* for this ruling (*sabab*)—is subjective and relative depending on the various lands and fancies of certain regions. So, it is considered neither an imperfection nor an unattractive trait (*danā'ah*), since the members of the Prophet's household (Ālu Bayt) who have lineages connecting to Hāshim b. 'Abd Manaf b. Quṣay, who are residents of these lands, are predominantly black. Similar can be said of the Arab tribes in lieu of the stated *ratio legis* (*'illah*).[129]

This quote reiterates an earlier point which is that if "blackness" is what makes a woman unattractive and necessarily undesirable, this would mean that most Arab women in Sudan are ignoble and undesirable. This would also apply specifically to people we know who are not ignoble: members of the family of the Prophet living in Sudan who "are predominantly black." This corroborates the claim of this ruling being based on a subjective reading of the text rather than rooted in objective criteria. Rather, it is reading rooted in a subjective cultural hermeneutic.

---

[128] 'Uthmān b. Ḥusayn Barrī Al-Ju'lī. *Sirāj al-Sālik Sharḥ Ashal al-Masālik li Naẓm Targhīb al-Murīd al-Sālik 'alā Madhhab al-Imām Mālik ibn Anas*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2001, vol. 2/41-42.

[129] 'Uthmān b. Ḥusayn Barrī Al-Ju'lī. *Sirāj al-Sālik Sharḥ Ashal al-Masālik li Naẓm Targhīb al-Murīd al-Sālik 'alā Madhhab al-Imām Mālik b. Anas*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2001, vol. 2/41-42.

Maybe "Black" Isn't Beautiful After All

Are opinions about "white" presumptive beauty and "black" presumptive ugliness based on objective standards? Apparently, many scholars would answer in the affirmative. Take, for instance, the statement of the Mālikī [Sufi] scholar, Ibrāhīm b. Mar'ī al-Shubrakhītī (1106/1694) when speaking about Adam and the etymology of his name who says,

> ...The verb scale (Ādam) is derived from [the word] '*udmah*'... which is a redness that inclines toward blackness. [It also comes] from the '*adīm*' of the Earth, which is the outer surface of it as has been verifiably transmitted from Ibn 'Abbās and related from 'Ali and Ibn Mas'ūd. But none of this is inconsistent with what has been related concerning the excellence of *Adam's* beauty and that Joseph possessed one-third of *Adam's* beauty. That is because beauty is not inconsistent with brownness, since Adam's brownness was between whiteness and redness.[130]

What Al-Shubrakhītī is suggesting here is that if Adam's putative "redness" was between blackness and redness or inclined toward blackness rather than whiteness, it would be nearly impossible to reconcile the claim of Prophet Yusuf possessing only one third of Adam's beauty. It would have sufficed him to say, "That is because beauty is not inconsistent with brownness..." But the addition of, "...since *Adam's* brownness was between whiteness and redness" suggests that if Adam's brownness was, perhaps, between "*blackness* and redness" there would be some inconsistency between brownness and beauty. This is extremely problematic, for it establishes and/or reinforces a stereotype that beauty can only be found in light colored peoples. It is also problematic, because Al-Shubrakhitī takes liberty with the Arabic word "ādam" which means "dark brown" according to lexicographers and alters that to now mean "red."[131] That's not to mention that he presumes Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) to have been white-skinned as well.

---

[130] Ibrāhīm b. Mar'ī Al-Shubrakhītī. *Al-Futūḥāt al-Wahabiyyah bi sharḥi arba'īna ḥadīthan al-Nawwawiyah*, Egypt: Sharikah Maktabah wa Maṭba'ah Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Awlāduhu bi Miṣr, 1955, p. 288.

[131] The 14th century lexicographer Al-Fayrūzābādī in his *Qāmūs* states that the term '*udmah*' from which the name 'Adam' is derived means brown when applied to the human being. For similar reasons, modern lexicographers like Hans Wehr and J.G. Hava translated the Arabic verb 'a-d-m' to mean "to be brown" or "tan." J.G. Hava. *Arabic English Dictionary for Advanced Arabic Learners (al-Farā'id al-Durriyyah)*, New Delhi: Goodword Works, 2001, p. 5; Hans Wehr. *Hans Wehr Dictionary for Modern Arabic*, Ithica, New York: Spoken Languages Services, Incorporated, 1976, p. 10.

Of course, this brings us back to reflect once again upon Muhammad Al-Dardīr's (d.1814) anathemization of Muslims for characterizing the Prophet Muhammad as "black" (*aswad*). [132] As already stated, Al-Dardīr is not expressing a novel opinion. This opinion is also expressed by other Mālikīs as well as by scholars of other schools. According to the celebrated Shāfi'ī scholar Yahyā b. Sharaf al-Nawwawī,

> ...If one were to say that the Prophet—God's blessing and peace upon him—was black or he died before growing a beard or said: "He is not Qurashi", it would be disbelief (*kufr*), because describing him contrary to his proper description is to negate and belie him.[133]

The Mālikī judge 'Iyāḍ b. Mūsā (544/1149) quotes Ahmad b. Abī Sulaymān (291/904), as having said, "Whoever says the Prophet—God's blessing and peace upon him—was black will be executed."[134] The difference, however, between the view of Al-Nawwawī and that of the aforementioned Mālikīs is that the former explains the basis for the person's unbelief to be the result of "describing him contrary to his proper description," not because calling him "black" is a form of disparagement, as was the opinion of the aforementioned Mālikīs. Presuming that all these men, including Al-Nawwawī, had white skin considering the regions in which they lived (Egypt, Syria, Andalus), it should not be surprising that "black" may have been commonly considered an unattractive color. Al-Nawwawī, however, does not offer "disparagement" as the reason for the accusation of unbelief. This is consistent with Al-Nawwawī's own acknowledgement that most of the Arabs were "brown" (*sumr*), in addition to his claim that the "browns" and "blacks" constitute the majority of the earth's inhabitants.[135]

Another Andalusian scholar, the famed exegete known as Al-Qurṭubī (671/1273), similarly said, "Whoever says that he was black (*aswad*) or bulky thereby denying what is known of his description, that is tantamount to unbelief." Once again, one can be fairly certain that Al-Qurṭubī as a likely non-"black" scholar would have experienced less apprehension about holding such a strong opinion. Such a position would appear difficult to defend considering that it demands of Muslims to embrace the belief that it is derogatory to describe someone as "black" and that black skin signifies imperfection. Apart from Al-Nawwawī, these scholars suggest that a chief element of Muslim doctrine is to believe that "black" is a derogatory description, making "blackness" a misfortune. If such were true, one wonders how such a teaching might have affected Bilal b. Rabah and other early Abyssinian converts among the Companions had the Prophet uttered such a thing in their presence. What might it had done to their faith in Islam as God's true religion and Prophet Muhammad as God's emissary? One might also imagine "blacks" being repulsed by their own reflections had it been true that black skin was objectively ugly and white skin objectively beautiful.

---

[132] Muhammad 'Arafah Al-Dasūqī. *Hāshiyah al-Dasūqī 'alā al-Sharḥ al-Kabīr*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1905, vol. 4/309.

[133] Al-Nawwawī. *Rawdah al-Tālibīn wa 'Umdah al-Muttaqīn* (Beirut: Al-Maktab Al-Islāmī, 1991)

[134] Al-Qādī 'Iyāḍ al-Yahṣubī. *Al-Shifā' bi Ta' rīf Ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2000, vol. 2/144.

[135] There seems to have been universal acknowledgement that Blacks and browns made up the majority of the earth's inhabitants since writing about human beings begun with Herodotus and Homer. Many Muslim historians affirm this as fact as well, including Ibn al-Jawzī. 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī. *Tanwīr al-Ghabash fī Faḍl al-Sūdān wa al- Ḥabash*, Riyadh: Dār al-Sharīf, 1998, p. 34.

In Muslim sources, both Moses and Jesus are described as black or at least dark brown. If there is something fundamentally flawed about having black skin, then it would follow logically that no prophet of God ever had black skin, especially when we consider the unverified tradition attributed to Prophet Muhammad as allegedly having said, "Kill anyone who disparages a Prophet."[136]

The adjective "black" (*aswad*) has both a literal and metaphorical connotation. Its metaphorical usages can connote disparaging qualities. Therefore, conventional reasoning dictates that we avoid applying it to God's apostle, especially in light of Iyāḍ's (544/1149) mortal warnings against those who detract from the Prophet's stature in any way.[137] But does this, conversely, give us free reign to refer to him as "white," as is the custom of many Muslims in light of certain reports describing his skin color as white (*abyaḍ*)? If "black" can prove so disparaging, couldn't "white" with its derogatory connotation among the early Arabs as a skin ailment characterized by white spots or albino-like skin discoloration (*baraṣ*) also be taken as a form of diminution from the prophetic standard? Undoubtedly, the black-white binary prevalent in many societies further exacerbates the quandary posed by translations that do not give due consideration to ideational revolutions in language and historical-cultural contextualization. This bifurcation both oversimplifies racial purity and diversity and problematizes the use of these terms about both the Prophet of Islam and the position of "Blacks" in historical societies. As stated once before, the Prophet was neither African nor European. And, since there is a direct correspondence between those two words and the words "white" and "black", it might prove most prudent to eschew translations that paint Prophet Muhammad as having a direct affinity with either group.

---

[136] Qādī 'Iyāḍ relates in his *Shifā'* that the Prophet Muhammad said, "Kill whoever reviles a prophet, and strike anyone who reviles my companions." The authenticity of the report, however, is uncertain, especially considering that it includes a prohibition against reviling his companions. Muslim traditionists, generally, rejected reports which advocated the sectarian views of certain factions. This report clearly advocates an anti-Shiite perspective in that Shiites have endorsed reviling and cursing of the Prophet's companions who did not support 'Ali as rightful heir to the Prophet. In addition, hadith scholars highlight abnormalities (*qalb*) in the chain of narration (*isnād*) including the unreliability (*ḍa'f*) of one of the narrators.

[137] Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ Abū al-Faḍl Al-Yaḥṣubī. *Al-Shifā bi Ta'rīf Ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2000, pp. 130-183.

That perceptions among many Americans and others are skewed by popular racial constructs which reinforce the idea of biologically homogenous race-types, when contemporary readers look upon medieval religious texts, they are challenged to overcome the natural tendency to apprehend and judge old cultures according to contemporary moral standards and taxonomies. For this reason, instead of making North African Mālikism of the Enlightenment Period my point of departure for understanding "why" a discriminatory rule for "black women" in marriage does exist in the school, I attempt to reach back further into the past to show that this phenomenon is not actually an exception to normal human interaction. I try to show that it operates well in accord with the general rule of ethnocentric bias and class-based politics. Consequently, mention of Arab disdain for the "black" African, while challenging for not wanting to reinforce negative stereotypes about contemporary people, it is an attempt to avoid the error of seeing Arabs as an exclusively or majority "white" race. For this reason, I ventured into the discussion of Arab originality, growth, expansion, and evolution. Similarly, when I speak of the "Negro", I wish to challenge the popular assumption of "Negro" being a term which was originally inclusive of all sub-Saharan Blacks, but rather as a referent to the unclothed Bantu-speaking east African cannibal from the areas known today as Zanzibar and Tanzania. Indeed, for Arabs prior to the conquest of the North African region referred to as *Ifriqiyā* (Tunis, Algeria, Libya), there is no indication of Arab acknowledgment of a region called Africa as we know it today. That notwithstanding, the existence of the Zanj, those very people to whom I have referred as "Negroes," was well-acknowledged due to encounters with them before and after Islam reached Arabia. There is good reason to believe that lexicographers who translated the term "Zanj" as "Negroes" included historical and geographical considerations into their translation of the word. As quoted in an earlier chapter, Al-Fayyūmī in his *Al-Misbāh Al-Munīr* gives reason to think this to be accurate as well; in addition to historian John G. Jackson who makes this same distinction between the "Negro" and other types of "civilized" Blacks, like Moors, Ethiopians, etc. When one considers the fact that language evolves and often loses its original connotation overtime, it is easy to see that there is no fundamental contradiction between the correctness of translating "Zanj" as "Negroes." Once this point is clear, my hope is that the reader will understand what it means when I say that a Negro was not viewed as a normal African, neither by most Africans themselves nor non-Africans. So, when elite slaves of colonial America, Ibrahima Abdul-Rahman, and Umar bin Sayyid, denied that they possessed any "Negro blood",[138] they were distancing themselves from the stereotypical "uncivilized" African, not an absolute denial of their own patent Africanness.

---

[138] Kambiz GhaneaBassiri. *A History of Islam in America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 18-26.

CHAPTER 3

Perceiving "Black" Through Arab Eyes

The Arab perception of the dark African phenotype and African peoples during the revelatory period of Islamic history and beyond is of particular importance. It is, indeed, to this topic I devote attention in this chapter. How *did* Arab Muslims perceive of Blacks during the time of the Prophet? I do understand that speaking of an "Arab" perception problematizes the very claim of the elusiveness of racial categories. For if race is, indeed, a social construct, it would demand that we identify and challenge the "realness" of Arabness itself. What does it mean to be Arab? Who determines what and how many factors constitute authentic Arabness? But, if I can challenge the realness of "Arabness," I can also challenge the realness of "blackness.

According to pan-Africanist claims, Islam is an Arabcentric religion brought by the "Arab" prophet Muhammad. Like European Christians, Arabs exploited the free labor of Blacks after capturing and enslaving them. The pan-Africanist scholar Chancellor Williams (1893-1992) said,

> To repeat, then, Blacks are in Arabia for precisely the same reasons Blacks are in the United States, South America, and the Caribbean Islands—through capture and enslavement. In studying the actual records in the history of the race, therefore, the role of "white" Arabs must not be obscured either by their Islamic religion or by the presence of the Africans and Afro-Arabs among them any more than we should permit white Europeans and white Americans to use Christianity to cover their drive for power and control over the lives of other people.[139]

---

139 Chancellor Williams. *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.*, Chicago: Third World Press, 1987, p. 23.

In other words, if "white" Arabs who have dominated perspectives on Islamic orthodoxy are anti-black racists, then Islam, like Christianity, must undeniably be a racist religion unsuited for black people. Such allegations presume Arabs to be a white—rather than a black—race, slavery an inherently evil system,[140] and race a biological fact—rather than a social construct. Other presumptions are that Blacks were an anomaly in Arabia, they had no significant role in Arab society, and that black Africans were generally mistreated by their Arab masters.

The claim of "Arab" collusion with their "white" European counterparts can only be sustained by accepting that race is a biological fact and that Arabs are a species of the white genus. We have already seen that the presumption of Arab whiteness is difficult to sustain when we consider the soundest prophetic traditions which paint a different picture together with the statements of Muslim authorities to the contrary. If the Arabs of the prophetic era were not largely white-skinned, this would significantly weaken pan-Africanist claims, since if Arabs can be proven to be a black "race" rather than one that is white, pan-Africanist claims of Arab racism toward Blacks becomes largely untenable.

Though anthropologists have struggled to determine the fate of the bygone Arabs (*bā'idah*) referenced in ancient writings, inscriptions, and even biblical literature, in this chapter the Arabs residing in Arabia during the prophetic era will be represented as the "original" Arabs ('āriba*h*). All others will be deemed 'Arabized' Arabs (*musta'ribah*) who appropriated Arabian culture and religion after Islam spread outside of Arabia.

As for "Blacks", this term can also be confusing since its meaning varies from time and place. Arabs of the prophetic era (those I refer to as the "original" Arabs) normally reserved the designation, "Blacks," for those residing in Arabia who largely originated from the Horn of Africa (viz. Ethiopia, Nubia, Zanzibar).[141] When "black" was utilized to refer to Arabs themselves, it was usually qualified with mention of the tribe or clan to which the person belonged. For this chapter, unless qualified, "black" refers to Africans domiciled in Arabia.

---

[140] Slavery was universally tolerated in the premodern world even though it is widely viewed today as a universal evil. Islam attempted to reform the system and held manumission of slaves to be a moral good (Q 90: 8-13). The Qur'ān encouraged slave owners to find suitable mates for their slaves (Q 24: 32) and to allow them to purchase their freedom (Q 24: 33). Freedom is the natural state of all people according to Islam. And Muslims acknowledged that servitude was not an ideal for any person. Freedom, however, was not always advantageous for premodern peoples especially if one was poor. A royal slave and one serving the extremely wealthy might have greater access to life's comforts than a free destitute person. A free person might have to toil to find daily nourishment, while slaves of rich landowners attempting to live according to Islamic ideals might enjoy the regular privilege of satiation and luxury. The concubines of the Abbasid caliphs during their reign in Baghdad were highly influential mothers in that their sons were in line to inherit the throne from their fathers. Almost all the Abbasid caliphs prior to the sack of Baghdad by the Mongol invaders were the sons of concubines.

Arab perceptions of Blacks are important for several reasons, not the least of them being the very fact that several pan-Africanist writers claim that Arabs—and Islam by extension—possess an inherent antipathy toward Blacks. For the average Muslim, such an allegation may seem ridiculous and clearly the result of cultural bias. One must, however, consider three important facts which on the surface appear to corroborate pan-Africanist claims: 1) There exist a number of putative prophetic traditions which disparage Blacks; 2) There was disdain for Africans amongst the pioneer Muslim community, which appears to have lasted through the European Enlightenment Period; and 3) a number of scholars felt it their duty to author treatises in defense of Blacks.

Such facts at a minimum may lead one to conclude that there was a "black" problem in Muslim civilization, as was the case in the history of Europe and elsewhere. Despite this, the fact that black devaluation has been universal does challenge any potential ascription of its etiology to Islam, even if it can be proven that certain sources may have reinforced latent ethnic and cultural biases.

To provide a cogent response to the allegation that Islam has an inherent disdain for Blacks, I will discuss the prophetic traditions which disparage Blacks, along with their authenticity and potential influence on the early Muslim community. This will be followed by a look at examples of how members of the pioneer community disparaged Blacks and black skin during and after the life of the Prophet. Then, I will turn to examine the works of three scholars who wrote pioneering treatises extolling the virtues of Blacks.

---

141 The references to "Blacks"—especially the more negative references— by writers like Al-Mas'ūdī, Ibn Khaldun, and others are directed against those of the Sub-Sahara and especially those Bantu speaking peoples from the east African coast from the likes of Zanzibar. The historian John G. Jackson said, when speaking about anthropologist Mary Leakey's discovery of the skull of an ancient hominid in 1959 which she named Zinjanthropus boisei, "The "Zinj" part of the name is from the Arabic name for East Africa..."

John G. Jackson. *African Civilizations*, New York: Citadel Press, 1994, p. 46.

Did Prophet Muhammad Have Anything to Say About Blacks?

Bilal b. Rabāh is one of the most famous and important personalities in Islamic history. At the start of the Prophet's mission, he was an Abyssinian slave who had the great misfortune to serve a cruel chieftain by the name Umayyah b. Khalaf. Upon hearing the Prophet's message, Bilal accepted Islam during his captivity. According to Muslim history, the exemplary companion, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, purchased Bilal's freedom after finding Bilal's torture no longer bearable to watch. Umayyah attempted to force Bilal to renounce his newly found faith. Bilal refused to recant, repeating with what remaining breath he could muster the words "Aḥad…Aḥad," "One…One," defiantly refusing to acknowledge the Meccan pantheon.

This story brought Bilal great prestige in the annals of Muslim history and has served for more than a millennium as a hallmark of Islam's cultural and ethnic diversity. That being so, it would seem uncharacteristic for the Prophet Muhammad to declare as reported by certain traditionists that, "The black person belongs to his stomach and private part",[142] "There is no good in Abyssinians (*al-ḥabash*)",[143] or that "The worst slave is the Negro (*Zanj*)."[144] Similarly, it is reported that he said, "Seek out the good seed among you, and marry compatible mates. But avoid the Negro. For verily, he is a dysmorphic creature."[145] Bilal clearly saw the truth of God and great hope in Islam. He was, after all, ready to give his life for his beliefs, even when the Prophet Muhammad had very few supporters.

It would seem, then, uncharacteristic of the Prophet to remark so disparagingly about Bilal's people, especially when the Qur'ān extols the

---

[142] Muhammad b. 'Abd Al-Raḥmān Al-Sakhāwī. *Al-Maqāṣid Al-Ḥasanah fī Bayān Kathīr min Al-Aḥādīth Al-Mushtahirah 'alā Al-Alsinah*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1979, pp. 111-112.

[143] Muhammad b. 'Abd Al-Rahman Al-Sakhāwī. *Al-Maqāṣid Al-Ḥasanah*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1979, pp. 111-112.

[144] Muhammad b. 'Abd Al-Raḥmān Al-Sakhāwī. *Al-Maqāṣid Al-Ḥasanah*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1979, pp. 111-112.

[145] The earliest record of this hadith is in Abū Nu'aym's *Akbār Aṣbahān* around the 11th century. It is traced back to Rawḥ b. 'Iṣām. See Ahmad b. 'Abd Allah Abū Nu'aym Al-Aṣbahānī. *Kitāb Tārīkh Aṣbahān: Dhikr Akhbār Aṣbahān*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1990, vol. 1/369-370. For most of Islamic history the hadith was deemed a fabrication by many and at least non-canonical by others. In the 15th century, Al-Ṣuyūṭī defended its soundness along with that of the other hadiths which disparage Blacks. Ironically, the same Al-Ṣuyūṭī authored a work vindicating Blacks entitled, *Elevating the Stature of Blacks* (*Raf' Sha'n al-Ḥubshān*). See also Muhammad Nāṣir al-Dīn Al-Albānī. *Silsilah al-Aḥādīth al-Ḍa'īfah wa al-Mawḍū'ah wa Atharuhā al-Sayyi' fī al-Ummah*, Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma'ārif, 1992, vol. 2/159.

Prophet for his magnificent ethos (Q 68:4), characterizes him as a *"mercy to all creation"* (Q 21:107), and cautions him that *"if you had been harsh, or hard-hearted, they would have dispersed and left you"* (Q 3:159). What could be harsher and more alienating than telling someone that there is no good in him or that he was a freak of nature? The Prophet Muhammad is also alleged to have said, "A black person steals whenever he is hungry and fornicates whenever he is sated."[146] Similarly, he is accused of having said, "Buy slaves and share your earnings with them. But avoid the Negro [slave] because they have short lifespans and meager sustenance."[147]

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (751/1350) said, "…[T]he hadiths which disparage Abyssinians and Blacks are all fabrications."[148] The Ḥanafī scholar Mullā Ali al-Qārī (1014/1606) concurred with this view in his *Mawdū'āt*. Centuries before, the Ḥanbalī scholar 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī (597/1201) listed them as examples of spurious hadiths in his famous work under a similar title. Similarly, the late Salafī scholar, Muhammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (1914-1999) graded them as fabricated and weak. In his *Silsilah al-Aḥādīth Al-Ḍa'īfah wa al-Mawḍū'ah*, he said after objecting to Al-Suyūṭi's (911/1505) authentication of the hadith, "Don't speak to me of the Blacks. The black person belongs to his stomach and genitals",

> How could it be thought that this just divinely revealed moral code (*Sharī'ah*) would berate the entire community of Blacks when among them are those who are god-fearing, upright, and chaste just like other communities? And I wish I knew what the position of the non-Muslim amongst the Blacks would be if this universal disparagement of the sons of his race by the divinely revealed moral code of Islam had reached him.[149]

---

[146] Muhammad b. 'Abd Al-Raḥmān Al-Sakhāwī. *Al-Maqāṣid Al-Ḥasanah*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1979, p. 111.

[147] Nāṣir al-Dīn Al-Albānī traces the report back to Al-Ṭabarānī and Abū Nu'aym after grading the report as spurious (*mawḍū'*). He then proceeds to critique several of the narrators in the chain of transmission, and then raises contention with the text stating, "I have no doubt about the spuriousness of its text. And what a splendid thing that Ibn al-Jawzī did by citing it in *Mawdū'āt*." Muhammad Nāsir al-Dīn Al-Albānī. *Silsilah al-Aḥādīth al-Ḍa'īfah*, Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma'ārif, 1992, pp. 157-158.

[148] Muhammad b. Abī Bakr b. Ayyūb b. Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah. *Al-Manār Al-Munīf fī al-Ṣaḥīḥ wa al-Ḍa'īf*, Mecca: Dār 'Ālam al-Fawā'id, p. 90.

[149] Muhammad Nāsir al-Dīn Al-Albānī. *Silsilah al-Aḥādīth al-Ḍa'īfah*, Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma'ārif, 1992, vol. 2/158.

The very fact that these reports contradict the Qur'ānic portrayal of the Prophet and what we know of him from canonical works sufficiently invalidate any claim of their authenticity. But highlighting a tradition's lack of authenticity is not sufficient proof that Muslims have not adopted their disparaging teachings. That a number of traditionists (like those mentioned by Al-Sakhāwī in the forthcoming quote) as well as Al-Suyūṭī who paradoxically wrote a work in vindication of Blacks did in fact find some of these reports acceptable underscores this fact.

Our concern here, then, is with whether the influence of such traditions on Muslim understanding is remarkable. That such reports have influenced Muslim understanding over the centuries is corroborated by the work of a 15th century scholar entitled, *Good Intents: Regarding the Clarification of Traditions in Popular Circulation on Tongues* (*Al-Maqāṣid Al-Ḥasanah fī Bayān Kathīr min al-Aḥādīth al-Mushtaharah 'alā al-Alsinah*). The book's author, Al-Sakhāwī (902/1497), explains what he means by "popular." He said,

> By "popular," I do not mean to restrict this to refer to the nomenclature designation of "strong" (*qawī*), which means what is verifiably related from more than two people in most or every one of its stages [in the chain of transmission]. Rather, the intent I have decided to elucidate and distill is that which is popular on the tongue of the scholar who is precise in his probing, or from another in a specific town, or from specific people, or in the majority of towns and amongst most of those living. It includes this, as well as what some transmitters have exclusively related in such a manner whereas they prove to be the sole source, and things which have no reliable chain of transmission with anyone; rather, [I mean] even things that come from people known to report weak traditions, who also [errantly] blend together and alter the meanings [of reports].[150]

This clarification by the author helps to guide us as we seek to understand if traditions disparaging of Blacks had any significant influence on the psyches of non-Blacks throughout Islamic history. Al-Sakhāwī had the following to say while discussing hadith #220 in his aforementioned work,

> [As for] the hadith [stating], "Verily, the black person steals whenever he is hungry and fornicates whenever he is sated," Al-Ṭabarānī

---

[150] Muhammad b. 'Abd Al-Raḥmān Al-Sakhāwī. *Al-Maqāṣid Al-Hasanah*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1979, p. 3.

> [related it] in *Awsaṭ* from the hadith of 'Āishah, who ascribes it to the Prophet with the addition of, "And, verily, in them are two traits: genuine forgivingness and miserliness." It is found in Ibn 'Adī's *Kāmil* through his own channel. Ibn al-Jawzī [reports it] in *Mawḍū'āt* with the wording, "The Negro (*zanjī*) steals whenever he is hungry and fornicates whenever he is sated."

By quoting Ibn al-Jawzi's *Mawdu'āt*, a book written as a collection of spurious traditions to be avoided, Al-Sakhāwī alludes to the baselessness of the aforementioned reports if used to formulate and promote negative opinions about Blacks. This suggestion is, however, overshadowed when he insinuates in subsequent comments that the reports are, perhaps, acceptable. He said,

> A corroborating version can be found with him (Al-Ṭabarānī) in *Kabīr* from the hadith of Awsajah from Ibn 'Abbās, who said, "It was said: "O Messenger of God! Nothing prevents the Abyssinians of Banū al-Mughīrah from coming to you except for their fear that you will repudiate them." He said, "There is no good in Abyssinians. They steal whenever they are hungry and fornicate whenever they are sated. And, verily, in them are two good traits: charitableness and toughness when fighting." Bazzār related it with the wording, "There is no good in Abyssinians. If they are sated, they fornicate. And, verily, in them are two traits: charitableness and toughness when fighting."

Even though most Muslim traditionists consider traditions that disparage Blacks to be spurious, one should note as well that they reinforce common stereotypes about Blacks, such as physical "toughness" and forgivingness or "charitableness." Another stereotype reinforced is the idea that Blacks are slaves of their carnal lusts or that, as Carl Linneaus insisted, they are motivated by "caprice." Al-Sakhāwī continues,

> Al-Ṭabarānī relates in [his] *Kabīr* on the authority of Umm Ayman, who said, "I heard the Messenger of God—peace and blessing upon him—say, "The black person belongs to his stomach and genitals." Thus, he reported it from the hadith of Yaḥyā b. Abī Sulaymān from 'Atā' from Ibn 'Abbās with the wording, "The Blacks were mentioned in the presence of the Prophet—peace and blessing upon him—who then said, "Do not speak to me about Blacks! For verily, the black person belongs to his stomach and genitals."

Al-Sakhāwī, then, casts himself into a conundrum relenting to the putative authenticity of these reports even though he originally listed them in his book as examples of spurious traditions "popular on tongues," saying,

> Some of them (hadiths) corroborate others. Rather, the chain of Al-Bazzār is fair (*ḥasan*). And Abū Nu'aym has in what for which Al-Daylamī provided a chain from his own channel from Abū Rāfi' who ascribes to the Prophet [the saying], "The worse slave is the Negro. They fornicate when they are sated."

Finally, he mentions a remarkable story about the celebrated eponym of the Shāfi'ī School, Muhammad b. Idris al-Shāfi'ī, who is portrayed as having deemed the anti-black traditions to be authentic in what they teach about Blacks, saying,

> Our Imam Al-Shāfi'ī supported this hadith as well. It has been related to us concerning his laudable traits [compiled] by Al-Bayhaqī by way of Al-Muzanī, who said, "I was with Al-Shāfi'ī in the central mosque when suddenly a man entered the mosque inspecting those sleeping. Al-Shāfi'ī said to Al-Rabī', "Stand and say to him: a black slave of yours with an afflicted eye is missing." Al-Rabī' said, "So, I stood up and said this to him to which he responded: "Correct." Then, I said to him, "Come with me." He, then, came to Al-Shāfi'ī and asked him, "Where is my slave?" He replied, "You will find him at the prison." So, the man left and found him at the prison. Al-Muzanī said, "So, I said to him, "Tell us [how you knew]. You have left us puzzled." He said, "Sure. I saw a man enter from the door of the mosque inspecting those sleeping. So, I said [to myself], he's looking for a fugitive. Then, I noticed him inspecting the Blacks but not the whites. Then, I said [to myself], a black slave of his escaped. Then, I noticed him inspecting the left eye [of each sleeper], so I said [to myself], [the person] is afflicted in one of his eyes. I (Al-Muzanī), then said, "How did you know he was in prison?" He replied, "I remembered the hadith concerning the slaves:[151] "They steal when they are

---

[151] Notice that Al-Shāfi'ī endorses this report but a version which mentions merely "slaves" rather than "black slaves" or "the Negro." In other words, what is said of black slaves could be said of non-black slaves. This obviates any allegation or suspicion of Al-Shāfi'ī being an anti-black racist.

> hungry and fornicate when they are sated." So, I presumed that he did one of the two. It was later found to be true.[152]

These reports remind of things attributed to Blacks by Europeans during the Transatlantic slave period. Perhaps, this is why David Goldenberg alleges that "[t]he link of blackness and slavery, begins to appear in seventh-century Islamic texts."[153] Notwithstanding the fact that Goldenberg's claim doesn't hold up to serious scrutiny (as will be explained later), these reports do expose the views of scholars who deemed such traditions to be acceptable, like Al-Sakhāwī who grades Al-Bazzār's (292/904) version of the hadith as fair (*ḥasan*), and Al-Shāfi'ī who apparently accepted the authenticity of at least one of the hadiths. Those views are that Blacks are to be considered creatures of caprice who lack control over their carnal appetites. This stereotype concurs with the race taxonomy of the 18th century Swedish botanist, Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778), who described Blacks as a phlegmatic (read "lazy") "race" ruled by caprice (read "passion"). It also leads us to conclude that these scholars believed Blacks to be the subject of prophetic disdain, a thing which would complicate the view that Islam is a non-racist tradition had it not been for the fact that most scholars reject the traditions as apocryphal.

Of course, one could argue that the decision to employ these traditions as proof of black natural inferiority is rooted in a commitment to faith in that those scholars who internalized or relied upon these reports to reinforce previously held biases against Blacks was out of the belief that it was something which "Islam" demanded of them. That is to say that if the Prophet said it, it must be true. The story about Al-Shāfi'ī and the fugitive black slave contributes to this understanding. It can, however, be noted that regarding the account about Al-Shāfi'ī, he apparently affirms this hadith to be a reference to "slaves" rather than "black" slaves specifically. That Al-Sakhāwī relates the story after the many reports about "Negros", "Abyssinians", and "Blacks" gives the impression that Al-Shāfi'ī's own words must be taken to refer to black slaves. Perhaps, Al-Sakhāwī's suggestion is correct, but the ambiguity in Al-Shāfi'ī's quoted words leave room to argue the opposite, which is that he was not reinforcing anti-black stereotypes. Al-Sakhāwī himself would know that as a traditionist, weak hadiths are not to be presented as the basis of creed, especially if the creed unfairly berates others or corroborates the superiority of one's own subjective/

---

[152] Muhammad b. 'Abd Al-Raḥmān Al-Sakhāwī. *Al-Maqāṣid Al-Ḥasanah*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1979, pp. 111-112.

[153] David M. Goldenberg. *The Curse of Ham*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 197.

sectarian understanding. So, he and others can rightfully be criticized for carelessness in the authentication of traditions to say the least.[154]

To concede, as some traditionists like Al-Sakhāwī and Al-Suyūṭī did, that the aforementioned hadiths about the black African sexual appetite and predisposition to theft are acceptable, necessitates that Blacks are human beings whose natures are perverted and whose carnal appetites are likened to beasts of burden.

The other reports suggest that due to their dysmorphia, they are not to be sought in marriage out of fear that their foul blood will pollute the gene pools of others. This is not to allege that actual laws against intermarriage with black Africans were introduced and promoted in the mainstream schools of Islam. But, that is definitely the impression one might get from the aforementioned traditions and others. Though there are no clearly defined laws in this regard, there is ample reason for believing that non-Africans found sub-Saharan Africans and other dark-skinned people to be the least desirable in marriage.

Al-Jāḥiẓ, for instance, alleges a shift among Arabs after Islam came in terms of how Arabs saw their own marriageable compatibility with black Africans prior to Islam; and the fact that the "black woman" is specifically singled out by name in the Mālikī School as a species of "ignoble woman" (*daniyyah*) gives credence to the claim of undesirability as well.

If the traditions were all we had before us to determine Prophet Muhammad's own perspective on Blacks, I think it would be obvious how most would judge him. The demands of justice, however, are that we not surrender to prejudice with respect to Islam's prophet before we consider the authenticity of those reports and examine other more laudable statements ascribed to him about Blacks. One such statement is, "Take the Blacks [as exemplars]. For verily, three of them are amongst the nobles of the people of Paradise: Luqmān the wise, the Negus, and Bilal."[155] In a rigorously authenticated hadith, he said, "I have been dispatched to the red and the black." The "red" in this hadith is a reference to the "whites" of Europe, Syria, and Persia. The "black" refers to both the Africans and Arabs. Commentators like Al-Nawwawī,[156] Ibn Manẓūr,[157] Ibn Athīr,[158] and others all confirm that most of the Arabs historically were light brown (*asmar*) and dark brown (ādam). Due to this fact, Al-Jāhiẓ, who had roots in east Africa, said the following about the hadith,

---

[154] Al-Nawwawī says,

> Whenever you want to relate a hadith with a weak chain, do not say, "The Messenger of Allah—God's blessing and peace on him—said such and such…" and similar unambiguous expressions. Rather, say, "Such was related", "Such has reached me", "It was mentioned", "It has come", "It was conveyed" and similar things. Do the same regarding things whose authenticity you doubt. Traditionists and others permit neglecting mention of the chains of transmission and the narration of weak hadiths that are not spurious as well as acting upon them without clarifying their weakness in any area other than the divine attributes and the judgments, like the lawful and prohibited, and other things such as stories (*al-qaṣaṣ*), virtuous encouragement (*faḍā'il al-a'māl*), admonitions (*mawā'iẓ*), and the like which have no connection to creed and laws. And God knows best.

Yaḥyā b. Sharaf al-Nawwawī. *Al-Taqrīb wa al-Taysīr li Ma'rifah Sunan al-Bashīr al-Nadhīr*, Beirut: Dār al-Malāḥ, (no date), p. 88.

> We already know that God, Mighty and Majestic, sent His prophet to all humanity, to the Arabs and non-Arabs. So, when he says, "I was sent to the red and the black," and we are neither red nor white in his view, then, he was sent to and was referring to us when he said, "the black." People are classified under either one of these two designations (black or red). So, if the Arabs are part of "the red" [species], they are counted among the Romans, the Slavs, the Persians, and [those of] Khurāsān. But if they (Arabs) are from "the black", then he has extracted this designation of theirs from our own designation. And they were merely referred to as "black", in spite of being dark and light brown, since they are included with us in our species similar to how the Arabs subsume females under

---

[155] 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. 'Ali b. al-Jawzī Al-Qurashī. *Kitāb al-Mawdū'āt*, Medina: Al-Maktabah Al-Salafiyyah, 1966, vol. 2/232.

[156] Yaḥyā b. Sharaf al-Al-Nawwawī (d. 1278), the famous commentator on the canonical work known as *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, says of this statement,

> It has been said that the "red" is a reference to the non-Arab whites (*al-bīḍ min al-'ajam*), and the "black" refers to the Arabs since brownness (*sumrah*) is predominant among them and the people of the Sudan. It has also been said that the "black" refers to those of the Sudan, while the "red" is a reference to the Arabs and others. It has been said as well that the "red" are human beings, and the "black" are the sprites (*jinn*). All these views are correct since he was dispatched to all of them." Yaḥyā b. Sharaf Al-Al-Nawwawī. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi Sharḥ al-Al-Nawwawī*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995, vol. 3:1/4.

[157] Muhammad b. Mukrim b. Manẓūr al-Ifrīqī al-Miṣrī, *Lisān al-'Arab*, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1882, p. 209.

[158] "...the predominant colors among the non-Arabs are pale white (*ḥumrah*) and fair white (*bayāḍ*), while the colors that predominate among the Arabs are light brown (*sumrah*) and dark brown (*udmah*)." Muhammad b. Mukrim b. Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1882, p. 209.

> the male collective. And since the Prophet—peace and blessing upon him—knew that Negroes, Abyssinians, and Nubians are neither red nor white—being that they are black—and God sent him to the black and the red, he made us and the Arabs equal [in color], while we are truly those who are black, not them. So, if the term "black" is applied to us, we are the pure Blacks, while the Arabs are the quasi-Blacks. So, we are the first to whom the invitation was presented.[159]

In other words, if the Prophet himself described Arabs as "black", there is no basis for berating Blacks or black skin. This is because it would follow logically that if the Arabs are black and blackness is offensive, then the Prophet himself would be the subject of disparagement, since he was an Arab after all. Only a foolish person would give himself an offensive designation, not to mention that the Qur'ān expressly prohibits berating people with offensive names (Q 49:11).

In conclusion, the Prophet Muhammad's teachings are neither inherently racist nor anti-black. It is only because of the existence of fabricated hadiths collected by many and errantly authenticated by a few traditionists. The teachings promoted by these hadiths, however, never reached the level of orthodoxy. If such ideas had been held up as orthodox teachings, it is very unlikely that we would have witnessed the spread of Islam to Africa and later in the US where Islam has continually spread the fastest amongst black Americans. If black antipathy was common amongst Muslim missionaries or in most of the Muslim world, Malcolm X's letter from Hajj would have been of no consequence. Furthermore, Gandhi would have had no justification for praising Islam as the only religion which does not practice racism within itself.[160]

Were the Prophet's Companions Racists?

Another important question, after considering the disparaging comments about Blacks attributed to the Prophet, is whether colorism played a role in the lives of his companions. For while such accusations may be easily deflected from the Prophet, it does not follow necessarily that his followers were guiltless of color-based chauvinism and bigotry. Certainly, there was a general disdain for sub-Saharan Africans in Arabia which preceded Islam as was the norm with all premodern peoples towards others. Disdain for people with black skin reared its ugly head from time to time during the Prophet's life.

---

[159] Muhammad Harun. *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiz*, "Fakhr al-Sūdān 'alā al-Biḍān", Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānijī, 1964, p. 223.

[160] Howard Thurman. *The Luminous Darkness*, Richmond, Indiana: Friends United Press: 1989, p. 60.

On the day of the Meccan conquest, Bilal was commissioned by the Prophet—God's blessing and peace upon him—to climb to the roof of the Ka'ba to summon the people to gather for an address by the Prophet. Three of the Meccan chiefs who had just accepted Islam on that day were overcome with disgust at the spectacle of one of the most contemptible things in their hearts (a "black" man) climbing atop the most venerated thing in their hearts (the Ka'bah). It was already an extremely humiliating day considering their surrender. Now, they had to endure the sight of this most dreadful enormity. The three of them made negative comments about Bilal's color. One expressed how fortunate his late father was not to have witnessed this event. A second stated, "If God wants good, He will change this." A third went as far as saying, "Does Muhammad not have anyone other than this black crow to make the summons?"[161] Word of their objections reached the Prophet's ear, which led him to make a speech which included, "Each of you is from Adam, and God created Adam from dirt." Afterwards, the following words of the Holy Qur'ān were revealed, "*O People, We created you all from a single man and single woman, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you should get to know one another. In God's eyes, the most honored of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware*" (Q 49: 13). In other words, Africans and Arabs have common ancestors. Rather, all people share Adam and Eve as common ancestors, Adam being created from dirt. And, there is none closer to the color of Adam than Bilal. So, if one disparages Bilal for being black, one is also disparaging one's own father. But, most importantly, lineage or blood does not increase one's closeness to God. Only through piety can one approximate the Divine.

Besides Bilal's own challenges to gain inclusion in Arab society, there is the story of the African woman who used to clean the Prophet's Mosque.[162]

---

[161] Al-Qurṭubī relates this in his exegesis on Q 49:13. The three men are 'Attāb b. Asīd, Ḥārith b. Hishām, and Suhayl b. 'Amr. These were all members of the Meccan elite who accepted Islam on the day of the Meccan conquest. Abū Sufyān is also reported to have participated in this conversation but refrained from commenting beyond saying, "I will say nothing. I fear that the lord of Heaven will give news of it." Muhammad b. Ahmad Al-Qurṭubī. *Al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān wa al-Mubayyin limā taḍammanahu min al-Sunnah wa Āy al-Furqān*, Beirut: Mu'assassah al-Risālah, 2006, vol. 19/411.

[162] The report can be found in the collections of Muslim, Ibn Mājah, and Ahmad. While some narrators are uncertain if the mosque cleaner was a man or woman, others are confident it was a woman. And she was known as Umm

The woman died, and the Prophet's companions buried her at night. The narrator of the report states, "It was as if they minimized her value." When word got to the Prophet, he became angry asking why they hadn't alerted him. Their response was that they didn't want to awaken him or inconvenience him with the matter. He then demanded they take him to her grave, so he could pray over her.[163]

An incident which also suggests companion's disdain for Blacks is the story of Julaybīb. Julaybīb was an African companion who was martyred in one of the battles. According to Muslim, at the conclusion of the battle the Prophet asked, "Who's missing?" Companions started to name some who were not in attendance. When they finished, he asked again, "Who else is missing?" The names of more fallen fighters were mentioned. The Prophet asked again, "Who else is missing?" The companions said, "No one." After this time, however, the Prophet stated, "I am missing Julaybīb."[164] Once his body was found, the Prophet held him in his arms and said twice, "This is one of mine, and I am one of his." This gesture shows the level of commitment the Prophet devoted to ensuring that everyone felt valued and was treated fairly.

Thābit b. Qays b. Shammās was a dark Arab who married the sister of the chief hypocrite, 'Abd Allah b. Ubayy. Thābit's wife, Ḥabībah, approached the Prophet to request a divorce from Thābit, saying, "O Messenger of God! Nothing could ever unite my head and his. I lifted the side of the curtain and saw him approaching with a number [of men]. He was the blackest, shortest, and ugliest of them."[165] After asking whether she was willing to return the orchard that Thābit had given her as a dower or not, she agreed and obtained a divorce. Now, this story shows that it was not the single factor of "blackness" which made Habībah realize that her husband, Thābit, was not very attractive. For, she valued "height" and "handsomeness" as well, which means she did not necessarily equate "black" with being "ugly." The report does, however, indicate that in Habībah's mind the blacker the skin color, the less attractive a person is.

Miḥjan. Another narrator referred to her as Miḥjanah.

Ali b. Muhammad Al-Jazarī better known as Ibn al-Athīr. *Usd al-Ghābah li Ma'rifah al-Sahābah*, Beirut: Dār Ibn Hazm, 2012, p. 1624.

[163] Yahyā b. Sharaf al-Al-Nawwawī. *Sharḥ Muslim*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995, vol. 4/1/23.

[164] Yahyā b. Sharaf al-Al-Nawwawī. *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995, vol. 8/2/23-24.

[165] Ismā'īl b. Kathīr Al-Dimashqī. *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, Beirut: Mu'assassah al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 1996, vol. 1/260.

When word reached the Prophet of the negative comments made by the celebrated companion Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī about the mother of one of his Abyssinian slaves, he said to Abū Dharr,

> O Abū Dharr! You are a man who possesses traces of the days of ignorance." The Prophet then said to Abū Dharr, "They are your brothers. Allah has placed them in your custody. So, feed them from what you eat. Dress them from what you [yourself] wear. And do not burden them with anything which will overwhelm them. But if you do burden them with something beyond their capacity, then assist them.

After this incident, whenever Abū Dharr and his slave were seen together, no one could tell the difference between the slave and the master, since they wore attire of similar quality.[166]

In another reported incident, Bilal was berated by the sons of Bukayr whose sister Bilal expressed interest in marrying. When word reached the Prophet, he expressed his anger about the incident, which impelled the brothers to no longer stand in the way of Bilal's attempt to marry their sister.[167] In spite of this incident, there are several examples of Abyssinian companions and freed slaves who married Arab women from the nobility. This shows the efforts exerted by Arab companions to accommodate their African coreligionists. Among these examples are: Bilal who married the daughter of Bukayr as well as Hālah, the sister of 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf; Sālim, the freed slave of Abū Ḥudhayfah, who married Hind, the daughter of Al-Walīd b. 'Utbah b. Al-Rabī'ah; Al-Miqdād b. al-Aswad who married Ḍubā'ah bt. Al-Zubayr; and Zayd b. Ḥārithah[168] who married Zaynab bt. Jaḥsh. There are also other examples of "interracial" and "interclass" marriages among the pioneer community.

These examples show that even though Arabs found Africans generally to be undesirable in marriage, there was a sincere effort to overcome this cultural taboo. It is difficult still to indisputably prove that "black" undesirability related to the single factor of "blackness" rather than the combination of former slave status and color/non-Arabness. Additionally, these facts along with the mere decision to preserve these stories point to a sincere effort on the part of the Prophet's companions to revolutionize their culture and social order in conformity with Islamic ideals. We also notice how Prophet Muhammad stood firm in support of the Abyssinians and chided those who directed offense against them. That chiding at times, as in the case of Abū Dharr, would lead to an immediate attempt to reconcile. This, again, shows the Prophet's consistent opposition to racial bigotry. It was he, after all, who reminded the Arabs, "Whoever's work slows him down, his pedigree will not speed him up."[169] In other words, who one is related to has little meaning to Allah if one is not pious and does not do good works.

---

[166] Yahyā b. Sharaf al-Al-Nawwawī. *Sharḥ Muslim*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995, vol. 6/1/111.

[167] This further proves the spuriousness of the hadith, "Avoid the negro. For verily, he's a dysmorphic creature." For why would he aid Bilal in marrying an Arab woman if he believed such a marriage to be unnatural?

[168] Some biographers, like Ibn al-Jawzī, describe Zayd b. Ḥārithah as black-skinned (*ādam shadīd al-udmah*). But some sound reports suggest that he was light skinned.

In conclusion, while black Africans toiled at times to fit into early Muslim Arab society, a considerable number of Arab companions consciously attempted to make them feel at home. It must be kept in mind, though, that inclusion and enfranchisement was not an exclusive challenge for Africans. It was the same challenge for the Persian, Greek, and Jewish members of the community. Arabs would have, likewise, suffered similar frustrations in the lands where others dominated in light of the structure and order of premodern societies.

Is Racism Part of the Islamic Legacy?

According to Professor David Goldenberg of the University of Capetown, the Hamitic myth[170] which promotes the idea of inherent black slavehood originated with the Arabs during 7th century incursions into Africa not with the European Judeo-Christian tradition as believed by many today. We've already seen some of the disparaging reports of Blacks believed by some Muslims to originate from the Prophet. We have also seen that the African phenotype and dark skin had very low aesthetic value before and after the death of the Prophet amongst his companions. It would seem to follow logically, then, that racism is a part of the Arab "Muslim" legacy, just as much as it is part of the European "Christian" legacy. But what is racism? Which definition is most suitable? And who is its intended subject?

---

[169] Yahyā b. Sharaf Al-Nawwawī. *Sharh Muslim*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995, vol. 9/1/19.

[170] According to the Hamitic myth, Ham, one of three sons of the Prophet Noah, and his offspring believed to be black by several writers were condemned to be perpetual slaves of the children of his two brothers, Shem and Japheth. During the Transatlantic African slave trade, several Christians used this myth to justify the enslavement of Blacks. Several early Muslim historians also transmitted spurious reports which support such ideas. Ibn Khaldun, however, rejected it.

Race is a precondition for racism. And according to *Webster's New World Dictionary*, a race is: "1) any of the different varieties of human beings distinguished by physical traits, blood types, etc.; 2) loosely, any geographical population sharing the same habits, ideas, etc.;" and "3) any distinct group of people." The first definition is a biological classification of race. It matters little that people of similar physical traits and blood type may not consider themselves akin to others who share similar appearance but belong to a different culture or region of the globe. The second is a cultural definition which marginalizes phenotype. What matters most are shared habits, ideas, and history. Accordingly, skin tone is less important for membership even if most of the population may have a similar appearance. The third definition is the broadest of all and may, technically, apply to shared national origin or those who are citizens of the same country.

On the other hand, Webster defines racism as "the practice of racial discrimination, segregation, etc." Accordingly, a person may be discriminated against based on color, phenotype, culture, or national origin. Note how this definition makes no distinction between *de facto* or *de jure* discrimination or segregation. And due to its broadness, any person or institution with the power to control and influence the lives of those discriminated against can be guilty of racism.

What this suggests, then, is that once discrimination and segregation are practiced because of "racial" difference, racism exists. This would mean that as long as people do not "practice" discrimination—even if they consider their own "race" to be superior to another's, we are not encountering racism. Undoubtedly, people have different aesthetic and other tastes, especially when it comes to food, attire, and mates. For a man or woman to prefer to marry a member of his/her own "race" or another that he/she finds to be physically attractive does not necessarily make them racist or suffering from an inferiority complex. However, when aesthetic sensibilities and unfounded negative opinions about the other lead one to exclude certain types of people from social enfranchisement, employment, promotion, or marriage, then we are operating within a racist order. This would make Arabia, like other premodern societies, functionally racist against "all" non-Arabs not merely sub-Saharan Africans with respect to inclusion in the political hierarchy. This is in light of the fact that, as already stated, political leadership was restricted to Arabs alone, as was the case in other cultures in the world at the time. Furthermore, the "black" African was treated prejudicially rather than the "black" Arab, who was granted full enfranchisement to the exclusion of the former.

In New World history, we see racism in full force as many groups, especially "Blacks", for a long time were locked out of political, economic, and other forms of social privilege. The Racial Integrity Act of 1924 even made marriage between "Whites" and "non-Whites"[171] unlawful. Of course, we need to ask if anything similar has ever existed in Islamic history. And if so, was that order something unique to Muslim societies or in line with the norms of other civilizations around the world? If such institutions did exist in Muslim societies, were these institutions exclusively discriminatory against Blacks? But again, what is meant by "black" in Muslim sources and social arrangements?

Defining what is meant by "black" is extremely important, especially since racism often connotes anti-black prejudice and discrimination even though it can apply to any group of people, as with Islamophobia, which is viewed by some as primarily anti-Arab racism.[172] Although "black" was often used by Arabs to refer to sub-Saharan Africans, it was sometimes used in a more qualified fashion as in, "a black man from the Anṣār,"[173] "a tall black Ḥimyarite woman",[174] or "a black Nubian slave woman."[175] In Ibn Athīr's biographical dictionary of the Prophet's companions, he lists 26 of them who were named *'Al-Aswad'* ('The Black One') and 4 named *'Aswad'* ('Black'), without the definite article. He lists 5 named *'Abyaḍ'* ('White') with one whose original name was *'Aswad'* but was subsequently changed by the Prophet to *'Abyaḍ.'* Seven of the Companions listed are named *'Aḥmar'* ('Red'), which is the more common term used by Arabs for white skin, and one Companion whose name is *'Al-Aḥmarī'* ('the Reddish One'). One Companion was named *'Asmar'* ('Brown').[176] That so many Companions were named *'Aswad'* or *'Al-Aswad'* shows that the term "black" amongst the early Arabs did not exclusively connote negative attributes. In fact, the more neutral connotations of 'black' in the hadith literature are more numerous than those which are negative. Again, highlighting these facts is not meant to assert that Arabs viewed the world within the 'black-white' binary. But, it does reveal that they did not consider all that was black to be fundamentally bad.

---

[171] The "non-white" in the Racial Integrity Act included those of African and Native American ancestry. That "coloreds" included any given person with any amount of African and Native American ancestry meant that membership in American "coloredness" consisted of a wide range of black and brown skin colors. This corresponds precisely with the image we get of the Arabs of the early Islamic period.

[172] The anthropologist, Audrey Smedley, had the following to say about this,

> ...events of September 11, 2001, and the wars in the Middle East have generated a high level of fear and even panic among many Americans, who now respond negatively to anyone who appears to have an "Arab" phenotype. As a consequence, many black and Hispanic American men have found themselves being viewed suspiciously because of their physical resemblance to Middle Eastern men. Some have been harassed or attacked on the assumption that they are "Arabs."

Audrey Smedley. *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a World View*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2012, Preface to Fourth Edition, x.

[173] Yahyā b. Sharaf al-Al-Nawwawī. *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995, vol. 6/2/175.

[174] Yahyā b. Sharaf al-Al-Nawwawī. *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995, vol. 3/2/174.

[175] Sharaf b. Amīr al-'Aẓīm Ābādī. *'Awn al-Ma'būd 'alā Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, Amman: Bayt al-Afkār al-Dawliyyah, *no date*, p. 1409.

Understanding that 'black' has neutral, positive, and negative connotations[177] in the Arabic language and in the hadith literature is extremely crucial. For the fundamental error of pan-Africanist scholars has been to essentialize "black" identity throughout time and place. In other words, "black" in the American context is not the same as "black" in the Brazilian, Haitian, or Arab context. The Prophet Muhammad said, "The thin shinned one from Abyssinia will destroy the Ka'bah."[178] If "black" is primarily neutral in its connotation, there is little reason to understand the hadith as disparaging of Blacks. It is only when you assume references to black to be pejorative that one interprets such statements as offensive or racist.

The pan-Africanist hermeneutic used for Islamic scripture is further marred by several errant assumptions. Among those assumptions are that: Arabs are a non-black pro-white or even a white race. What pan-Africanists scholars do not realize is that their definition of Arab is highly influenced by common perceptions produced by media and by the 19th century induction of Arabs into the white race due to the writings of the Frenchman, Arthur De Gobineau (1816-1882), who invented the Aryan mastery race doctrine. As stated in an earlier chapter, Whites were divided into three categories: 1) Nordic; 2) Alpine; and 3) Mediterranean.[179] This later solidified the Arab as a subcategory of the "white" race in common perception. This understanding begets the assumption that black Arabs were an anomaly, even though the most celebrated Muslim authorities highlight that most Arabs were light brown and dark brown. If this is true, it would mean that if Arabs are responsible for the enslavement and sale of Africans, a black-on-black—not white-on-black—crime has been committed. Pan-Africanists cannot have their cake and eat it too. If "black" is to be applied to anyone who apparently has African blood, then Arabs must be considered black by pan-Africanist race criteria, especially those of the 'Adnānī branch whose foremother was Hager, the east African concubine of Prophet Abraham. This is precisely what the statement of Prophet Muhammad would suggest. For he said that he was "dispatched to the red and the black," as already discussed along with the commentaries of major authorities who highlight that most Arabs were light brown and dark brown (*asmar wa ādam*). This is even though "black" in the hadith is not an exclusive reference to Africans.

---

[176] 'Alī b. Muhammad Al-Jazarī. *Usd al-Ghābah fī Ma'rifah al-Saḥābah*, Lebanon: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2012, pp. 20-21, 40-46.

[177] Among the neutral connotations of "black" are: "a black man", "a black woman", "the black stone", "the black thread", "a black slave." Positive connotations include: "the two Blacks" i.e. dates and water, "the black seed is a cure for every illness." More negative connotations are: "I take refuge with you from a lion and a black creature" e.g. a scorpion, "Kill the two black things during prayer: the viper and the scorpion", "a black slave woman with a perforated nose who is religiously committed is superior", "two black angels with blue eyes."

[178] Yahyā b. Sharaf Al-Nawwawī. *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995, vol. 9/2/30.

[179] According to Arnold J. Toynbee,

Another major flaw in pan-Africanist thinking is that race is dealt with as a biological fact rather than a social construct. For this reason, race taxonomies prevailing in other countries are overlooked. So, pan-Africanists can fashion all Africans and others in their own image. But even that image is not one for which the pan-Africanist is, personally, responsible. It is an image imposed upon him which he naively appropriates as a realistic line of demarcation between himself, and "Whites" perceived of not possessing traces of African blood. The pan-Africanist idea that any amount of African blood makes one black, indeed, originated in the American and European contexts with which pan-Africanists are most familiar.[180] So, by exporting

---

> Nordic man was first placed on his pedestal by a French aristocrat, the Comte de Gobineau, early in the nineteenth century, and his idolization of 'the blond beast' was an incident in the controversies that arose out of the French Revolution.

He later says,

> Ethnologists, classifying White men in accordance with their physical types, long heads and round heads, fair skins and dark skins, and all the rest of it, have sorted out three main White 'races', which they call Nordic, Alpine and Mediterranean...What the value of these sub-divisions may be and whether at any time they represented historically and socially distinct peoples is another matter; the whole subject is exceedingly obscure.

Arnold J. Toynbee. *A Study of History: Abridgment of Volumes I-VI by D.C. Somervell*, New York, and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974, pp. 52, 54-55.

[180] Certainly, Arabs and Muslim exegetes did entertain the notion that "black" could be used as a term inclusive of more than people who live or immigrated from Africa as already highlighted from the hadith about "the black and the red" and the comments on it by Muslim authorities. The point here is that there is no

that idea and imposing it on the natives of other lands is an act of cultural imperialism similar to what which Africans, black Americans, and others were subjected by Europeans.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the flaws in pan-Africanist theorizing, there is one valid area of critique which can be underscored. That is the matter of black African enfranchisement in Arab and Muslim societies. As already stated, the very fact that three scholars (Al-Jāḥiẓ, Ibn al-Jawzī, Al-Suyūṭī) three centuries apart from one another (9th, 12th, 15th) in three societies ruled by people presumably of "non-*black*" skin (Basra, Baghdad, and Cairo) felt it necessary to write treatises in defense of Blacks speaks of a perennial problem of black antipathy. The Prophet Muhammad clearly tried his best to give Africans a prominent role in his community by giving Bilal the important function of making the call to prayer (*adhān*). There even exists a report which states, "Governing belongs to the Quraysh. Judgment belongs to the Anṣār. The summons belongs to the Abyssinians. And the treasury belongs to Azd."[181] Whatever the actual authenticity of this report, there is little doubt that inclusion was an aim of the Prophet. The 9th century was also important in that it saw the 14-year long Negro/Zanj Rebellion in Iraq (869-883). It was immediately before this time that Al-Jāḥiẓ, black himself, wrote his pioneering work, *Fakhr al-Sūdān 'alā al-Bīḍān (Boast of the*

---

indication that Pan-Africanist scholars were aware of this convention. Rather, their understanding of "blackness" originates from the North American context. The black American scholar Harold Cruse had the following to say about the problem of essentializing blackness,

> When one starts with the skin-color premise...on the Afro-American problem, one is, unfortunately, feeding a strong tendency within the Black Nationalist movement towards black-skin chauvinism—a policy which cannot work politically in the United States. It has never worked in the West Indies either; it can work only in Africa, it seems. But, in the United States, the American Negro group is too large and mixed with too many racial strains for the ideology of black skin supremacy to function within the group...In America, the Negro group is more an ethnic than a racial group—meaning a group of mixed African, Indian, and white strain...And in our time, the two leading exponents of Black Power and Black Nationalism have been racial hybrids—Adam Clayton Powell and Malcolm X.

Harold Cruse. *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, New York: The New York Review of Books, 1997, pp. 556-557.

[181] Muhammad b. 'Īsā Al-Tirmidhī. *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī: Al-Jāmi' Al-Mukhtaṣar min al-Sunan 'an Rasūl Allāh wa Ma'rifah al-Ṣaḥīḥ wa al-Ma'lūl wa mā 'alayhi al-'Amal*, Damascus: Dār al-Fayḥā, 1999, p. 885.

Blacks Over the Whites). It seems that black pride was a growing sentiment of the time due to an overall sense of unfair treatment. Mention of that, however, is not meant to overshadow the growing "white" or "pro-Persian" sentiment pervading during the time as well. If black antipathy was widespread, one could say that white antipathy among Arabs was just as common. This underscores the earlier point that Arabs viewed themselves as distinct from Africans, Persians, Romans, and Levantines. This would corroborate the assertion that Arabs were not a "white" race, at least not in their own eyes. And even though, as asserted by Al-Jāḥiẓ and others, Prophet Muhammad included Arabs in the category of "Blacks", they did not consider themselves a species of African.

If there was any black scholar during the 9th century who could be described as a medieval pan-Africanist, that would be Al-Jāḥiẓ.[182] In his work, Al-Jāḥiẓ makes a number of claims, among which are that: sub-Saharan Africans have closer blood ties to Qahtānī Arabs of southern Arabia than the northern 'Adnānīs have to Qahtānīs;[183] and that the ten sons of Prophet Muhammad's grandfather, 'Abd Al-Muṭṭalib, were dark black (*dulm*) and bulky (*ḍukhm*).[184] He also declares beauty and desire to be subjective. In this regard he says,

> If Whites gaze upon Blacks without lust, then the same applies to when Blacks gaze upon Whites. This is because lusts are dispositions (*'ādāt*), the most of which results from memetic imitation (*taqlīd*). Consequently, the most desirable women to the men of Basra are Indian women and the girls of the Jordan Valley. The most attractive women to those of Yemen are Abyssinian women and girls, while the most desirable of women to those of the Levant are Greek women and girls. Men's lusts are merely directed toward those they acquire through trade and capture except for abnormal men. But an analogy is not constructed upon the anomaly.[185]

This shows the mutual disdain which existed against premodern peoples, and that attraction and repulsion often result from the frequency and in-frequency of interaction between them. While the place of the sub-Saharan on the "humanity" scale in the eyes of many historically is at the bottom, this was not due to the single factor of blackness. It had much to do with notions of inferior civilization or former slave status.

---

[182] Perhaps, a better designation for Al-Jāḥiẓ might be "Pan-Sub-Saharanist," since it is unlikely that he would have recognized a "continent" called "Africa" in his time.

[183] 'Abd Al-Salām Muhammad Hārūn. *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ* "Fakhr al-Sūdān 'alā al-Bīḍān", Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānijī, 1964, p. 211.

[184] 'Abd Al-Salām Muhammad Hārūn. *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, "Fakhr al-Sūdān 'alā al-Bīḍān", Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānijī, 1964, p. 209.

[185] 'Abd Al-Salām Muhammad Hārūn. *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, "Fakr al-Sūdān 'alā al-Bīḍān", Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānijī, 1964, p. 215.

Al-Jāḥiẓ also alleges that pre-Islamic Arabs found Africans to be compatible mates, something which changed after the death of the Prophet.[186] Unlike modern pan-Africanists, though, Al-Jāḥiẓ denied that Arabs are a "white" race,[187] and he also observed that "white" (*abyaḍ*) is not a skin-color in the language of Arabs.[188] He further asserts that the first human, Adam, landed in India after the fall instead of in Africa.[189] Al-Jāḥiẓ also takes great pride in appropriating the negative stereotypes about Africans, like brute strength, alarming appearance, the love of melody, and magnanimity.[190] He alleged that both black and white women prefer to copulate with black men, and then in hyperbolic fashion averred that black women are more fertile than white women.[191]

'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī, on the other hand, begins his work by implicitly reinforcing white presumptive beauty.[192] Although he accepts the tripartite division of human beings popular among Christians and Jews already underscored, he rejects the myth of the "Curse of Ham."[193] In a section in his work which indirectly corroborates the claim of Al-Jāḥiẓ that the ten sons of 'Abd Al-Muttalib were black, he includes in the list of offspring of Abyssinian women Muhammad al-Jawād and Ja'far b. Mūsā b. Ismā'īl, both who were direct descendants of Prophet Muhammad. The former is considered the ninth of the Shiite infallible Imams.[194]

---

[186] 'Abd Al-Salām Muhammad Hārūn. *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, "Fakhr al-Sūdān 'alā al-Bīḍān", Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānijī, 1964, p. 197.

[187] 'Abd Al-Salām Muhammad Hārūn. *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, "Fakhr al-Sūdān 'alā al-Bīḍān", Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānijī, 1964, p. 216.

[188] 'Abd Al-Salām Muhammad Hārūn. *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, "Fakhr al-Sūdān 'alā al-Bīḍān", Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānijī, 1964, p. 207.

[189] 'Abd Al-Salām Muhammad Hārūn. *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, "Fakhr al-Sūdān 'alā al-Bīḍān", Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānijī, 1964, p. 224.

[190] 'Abd Al-Salām Muhammad Hārūn. *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, "Fakhr al-Sūdān 'alā al-Bīḍān", Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānijī, 1964, pp. 165-196.

[191] 'Abd Al-Salām Muhammad Hārūn. *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, "Fakhr al-Sūdān 'alā al-Bīḍān", Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānijī, 1964, p. 213.

[192] 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī Al-Qurashī. *Kitāb al-Mawḍū'āt*, Medina: Al-Maktabah Al-Salafiyyah, 1966, p. 33.

[193] 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī Al-Qurashī. *Kitāb al-Mawḍū'āt*, Medina: Al-Maktabah Al-Salafiyyah, 1966, p. 35.

[194] 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī Al-Qurashī. *Kitāb al-Mawḍū'āt*, Medina: Al-Maktabah Al-Salafiyyah, 1966, p. 246.

Most of the Africans showcased in the works of all three of the listed authors are largely celebrated for their piety rather than their political, economic, or military acumen. But to be fair, the same could be said for the roles offered and played by other non-Arab members of Arabian society and even most Arabs who did not have the right to contribute to leadership selection nor be nominated themselves. The fact is that premodern cultures acted prejudicially against those who they perceived of as outsiders, not simply because of their skin color. For this reason, as we have seen, having black skin was not equated with being non-Arab. But being an African did bring with it certain social disadvantages, as was the same with being Persian. Neither Bilal the Abyssinian nor Ṣuhayb the Greek[195] nor Salman the Persian were included amongst the elders responsible for choosing the caliph. And none of them were deemed fit for the role of caliph.

Some Muslim legal schools give the right to deny marriage offers made by non-nobles to women of noble stock (i.e. related to the Prophet or from the Quraysh tribe), be they Arab or non-Arab.[196] Certain Egyptian Mālikī Sufis discussed earlier promoted problematic ideas about Blacks/Africans, such as white presumptive beauty and black presumptive ugliness,[197] the presumptive slave status of Blacks,[198] and anathematized those who characterize the Prophet as "black" but not those who call him "white" even though the Arabs of old considered "white" to be equally, if not more disparaging.[199] We have also seen how in the highly influential Egyptian sector of the Mālikī School, certain black African women were deemed to be ignoble and characterized as "undesirable" (*ghayr marghūb fīhā*).[200] Of course, this can be seen as a natural result of black women living as minorities in a "white" dominated society where men are more interested in those they consider to be more like themselves and more accessibile. On the other hand, it is a dangerous teaching which if underscored without contextualization for modern readers and without a challenge can potentially lead to the social alienation and maligning of scores of people.

---

[195] Even though Ṣuhayb is referred to as Rumi or "Roman/Greek", he was an enslaved Arab who found his way back to Arabia later in life. See Ahmad b. 'Ali b. Hajar al-'Asqalānī. *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995, p. 66.

[196] 'Abd Al-Wahhāb b. 'Ali b. Naṣr Al-Baghdādī. *'Uyūn al-Majālis*, Riyadh: Maktabah al-Rushd, 2000, vol. 3/1058-1060.

[197] This comes out in the attempt made by the 17th century Azharī Sufi scholar, Ibrāhīm Al-Shubrakhītī, to reconcile between the notion of Adam's "blackness" and the hadith which states that the Prophet Yusuf was only 1/3 of Adam's beauty. His explanation fundamentally reinforces the idea that whiteness alone is sufficient a factor in determining beauty. Al-Shubrakhītī alters the meaning of the Arabic word for 'dark brownness/blackness' *(udmah)* to mean 'redness.' Following this distortion, he proceeds to argue that reconciliation can be carried out once we consider that Adam's putative 'redness' inclined toward white rather than black.

Ibrāhīm b. Mar'ī Al-Shubrakhītī. *Al-Futūḥāt al-Wahabiyyah bi sharḥi arba'īna hadīthan al-Nawwawiyah*, Egypt: Sharikah Maktabah wa Maṭba'ah Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Awlāduhu bi Miṣr, 1955, p. 288.

[198] The 19th century Egyptian Azharī Sufi Ahmad al-Ṣāwī, seeking to reconcile the claim of the slave status of the Qur'ānic personality, Luqmān the wise, while also being a prophet (Al-Ṣāwī, like several other theologians, did not believe a slave qualified to be a prophet) explains that "slave" would have to mean "brown-skinned." This would mean that black/brown skin is the presumptive color of a slave. Al-Ṣawi's opinion on this matter is important since he was one of the most influential Mālikī scholars of Azhar during his lifetime. Though the view that

In conclusion, the Arabs during the lifetime of Islam's prophet and beyond, clearly, entertained negative views of non-Arabs and black Africans especially. These views at times led to disparagement and social exclusion in conformity with the norms of premodern cultures everywhere. But it is also true that from the very beginning the Prophet and the Companions worked diligently to support the inclusion of Africans in his efforts to build a nation whose solidarity was based primarily on faith rather than the pre-Islamic blood ties. The emphasis on moral egalitarianism, encouragement of interclass and interracial marriage, and the efforts to humanize black Africans in the different Muslim lands all support this claim. These facts prove that "Islam" is not an inherently anti-black or Arabcentric[201]

---

slaves could not be prophets did not start with him, he was, perhaps, the first to suggest in the strongest terms that being a slave meant being "brown." That he was an intellectual giant of the 19th century in Egypt make his views a strong basis to normalize such ideas.

Ahmad b. Muhammad Al-Ṣāwī. *Kitāb sharḥ al-Ṣāwī ‘alā Jawharah al-Tawḥīd*, Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2009, p. 278.

[199] Muhammad ‘Arafah Al-Dasūqī. *Ḥāshiyah al-Dasūqī ‘alā al-Sharḥ al-Kabīr*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1905, vol. 4/309.

[200] The doctrine of undesirability in "Black" women is clearly on display in the major Mālikī sources, especially those authored by those of the Egyptian sector of the school. It also found support in Andalus apparently. (See Abū ‘Umar Yūsuf b. ‘Abd Allah b. Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Barr Al-Qurṭubī. *Al-Kāfī fī Fiqh Ahl al-Madīnah al-Mālikī*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1992, pp. 234-235). Note that while the Black woman is simply a species of "ignoble" undesirables (*daniyyah*), it is important to highlight that while she participates with the manumit and unappealing non-Arab, her undesirability appears to be limited to the mere aspect of color. Both the manumit and unappealing non-Arab obviously may have been "white" women. But why not equally underscore their presumptive "whiteness" as scholars have down with "blackness"?

[201] Note that there is a difference between saying Islam is "Arabcentric" and

faith tradition, even if many people have failed to live up to Islamic ideals. Anti-black sentiment is undoubtedly a part of the "Muslim" legacy. It, however, can only be considered a "normative" part of the "Islamic" or "prophetic" legacy if we accept the soundness of the hadiths which berate Blacks for their skin color and other things. We have already shown that those hadiths are apocryphal, weak, and not representative of orthodoxy by most scholars throughout most of Islamic history.

---

that it is "Arabic-centric." The former means that everything culturally Arab is given default Islamicity. The latter expression means, however, that the Arabic language is an important and inseparable part of the Islamic faith tradition in that the Qur'ān is in Arabic, Muslims must perform their canonical prayers in Arabic, etc. While there is some proof that certain pre-Islamic Arabian customs have had a major impact on the way scores of Muslims understand their faith and Arab racial superiority is upheld by certain Arab writers as orthodox doctrine, those developments in themselves are insufficient bases for claiming that the Islam brought by the Prophet Muhammad absolutely prefers Arabs over non-Arabs.

CHAPTER 4

The Connection between Blackness and Slavehood

In December of 1662, the fledgling English colony of Virginia made history by enacting a law relegating the presumptive slavehood and freedom of a child to the respective bondedness or free status of the newborn's mother. According to this new law,

> *Whereas* some doubts have arisen whether children got by any Englishman upon a Negro woman should be slave or free, *be it therefore enacted and declared by this present Grand Assembly,* that all children born in this country shall be held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother; and that if any Christian shall commit fornication with a Negro man or woman, he or she so offending shall pay double the fines imposed by the formeract.[202]

It is worth noting about this law that the "doubt" over the slave or free status of the child was only worth considering if the child was birthed by a "Negro" woman from an "Englishman." This suggests that by this time the connection between being a Negro and slave had already begun in the collective consciousness of colonialists. As for copulation between Negro men and English women, the law merely bars fornication, as it does for fornication of English men with Negro women. But we can assume from the wording of the law that children birthed by Negro men from English women would be classified as free from birth.

---

[202] William Waller Hening. *Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia*, Richmond, CA, 1809-23, vol. 11, p. 170.

Approximately two years later in 1664, Maryland passed a statute declaring presumptive slave status for all Blacks, even those who were free. In other words, would-be slaves and all Blacks born would become slaves regardless of the status of their mother. Subsequently, a slave rebellion erupted in Gloucester County, Virginia. By 1681, however, the Maryland law was overturned to reflect that slavery was to be determined matrilineally.[203]

Many factors over history have contributed to the promotion of the subhuman, or even unhuman status of the "Negro." Those factors include the ancient myth known as the "Curse of Ham." A common understanding is that Europeans are largely accountable for this theory's promulgation, which relegated "Blacks" to natural slavehood to non-Blacks. According to David Goldenberg, author of *The Curse of Ham: Race & Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity and Islam*,

> The link of blackness and slavery in the various versions of this work is clear, though implicit, while an explicit link, in the form of a dual curse of both blackness and slavery, begins to appear in seventh-century Islamic texts. This exegetical innovation coincides with the seventh-century Muslim conquests in Africa, which brought an increasing influx of black African slaves to the Near East. From this time onward, the Curse of Ham, that is, the exegetical tie between blackness and servitude, is commonly found in works composed in the Near East, whether in Arabic by Muslims or in Syriac by Christians.[204]

In other words, instead of European Christians being the pioneers of the doctrine, which solidified "Blacks" as the perennial "other" deserving of slave status, it turns out that Europeans, according to Goldenberg, simply appropriated the doctrine from Arab Muslim sources. Though I will later raise a certain difficulty over this claim, Goldenberg's thesis concerning the role of the Curse of Ham myth in the association between blackness and slavehood is corroborated by Ahmed E. ElBashir in *The United States, Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Nile Valley*. ElBashir, unlike Goldenberg, however, alleges that it was the European Christian version rather than that of Arab Muslims which led to this association in the minds of European slavers. ElBashir says,

---

[203] Michael L. Conniff. *Africans in the Americas: A History of the Black Diaspora*, Caldwell, New Jersey: The Blackburn Press, 1994, p. 128.

[204] David Goldenberg. *The Curse of Ham*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 197.

> The trans-Atlantic slave trade in the sixteenth century and afterward overshadowed the Muslim slave trade while inheriting and expanding its attitudes toward black African slaves. To the West, the Judeo-Christian heritage concerning Ham's descendants' enslavement and their color came in handy. Although American slavery had reduced the black slave to a chattel and surpassed other slave systems in its cruelty, it was by no means the forerunner in identifying slavery with black Africa. The groundwork for such identification had been already laid elsewhere. The Americans inherited it, elaborated on it, and turned it into a concrete social and legal structure.[205]

While Elbashir does not explicitly ascribe the "Curse of Ham" to Arab Muslim sources, traditions reputing the doctrine exist in early Muslim exegetical literature. Though it is unlikely, as alleged by Goldenberg, that this exegetical nexus happened in the 7th century, the work of the 9th century scholar, Abū 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī (279/892), does document the following tradition which he grades as fair (*ḥasan*), "Shem is the father of the Arabs. Ham is the father of the Abyssinians. And Japheth is the father of the Romans."[206] This report, however, only asserts the genealogy of the three groups, without mention of skin color nor the presumptive slave status of Ham's progeny.

The Muslim traditionist, Abū Bakr al-Bazzār (292/905), relates a version of this report as follows:

> Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth bore children: Shem bore the Arabs, the Persians, and the Romans, who all possess goodness. Japheth bore Gog and Magog, the Turks, and the Slavs, none of whom possess goodness. And Ham bore the Copts, Berbers, and the Blacks."[207]

Clearly, both reports cannot be authentic, since the former declares the Romans to be the offspring of Japheth, while the latter lists them as the progeny of Shem. In fact, the only point of intersection between the two reports is that the names of Noah's three sons were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Additionally, the report attributes "goodness" to Shem's progeny, negates goodness from the progeny of Japheth, and remains silent concerning Ham's progeny.

---

[205] Ahmed E. Elbashir. *The United States, Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Nile Valley*, Lanham: University Press of America, 1983, pp. 21-22.

[206] Muhammad b. 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī. *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, Damascus, Riyadh: Dār al-Fayḥā', Dār al-Salām, 1999, p. 734 Hadith #3231.

[207] 'Abd Al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī. *Raf' Sha'n al-Ḥubshān*, Cairo: Al-Mu'allif, 1991, p. 62-64.

Yet, another 9th century tradition, though deemed spurious, was collected by the traditionist Ibn Sa'd (d. 845) in his *Tabaqāt* which reads,

> To Noah was born Shem, whose offspring possess a mixture of white and dark brown skin (*bayād wa udmah*); Ham, whose offspring possess a mixture of black and a bit of white skin (*sawād wa bayāḍ*); and Japheth, whose [offspring] have fair and pale white skin (*shuqrah and ḥumrah*).[208]

Note that, in spite of its spuriousness, this report suggests that the descendants of Shem and Ham are people who possess "brown" and "black" skin, while only the descendants of Japheth seem to qualify as "white." Then, assuming this tradition is authentic, when taken together with the previous tradition, it suggests that the original Arabs, Persians, and Romans all possessed "brown" skin. It becomes difficult to maintain such a claim about the Romans, without disregarding the second report, considering the previous point about confusion over if Shem or Japheth is their progenitor. The same would apply to the Persians, since the widely accepted theory is that the Persians were, as is today, a predominantly "white" race. It was, indeed, true that the Arabs of the prophetic era characterized both the Romans and Persians as "red" people, which was their way of saying, "white."

That notwithstanding, one must contend with the claim of historian John G. Jackson that, "According to Homer and Herodotus, the inhabitants of the following territories were Ethiopians: 1) the Sudan; 2) Egypt; 3) Arabia; 4) Palestine; 5) Western Asia; 6) India." He, then, says, "The Ethiopians are currently thought of as being exclusively an African people, but the case was different in ancient times."[209]

That is to say that human geopopulations acquired their color-based designations based on the complexion of the 'majority' of each territory's inhabitants. Al-Suyūṭī quotes al-Nawwawī as stating in his *Tahdhīb al-Asmā' wa al-Lughāt*, "Ethiopians are a well-known race of men (*jīl*) whose lineage goes back to Ham, son of Noah. They are the majority of people, and their lands are the most populated of lands."[210] Many Muslim scholars including the Hanbalī, Ibn al-Jawzī[211] (597/1201), and the famed Shāfi'ī traditionist, Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī (852/1449), have expressed similar views. If this is true, Jackson's assertion that Homer and Herodotus subsumed the populations of all the listed territories under Ethiopia does not seem to lack substance.

---

[208] Ibn Sa'd. *Tabaqāt*, Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānijī, 2001, pp. 23-24. Al-Ṭabarī reports the tradition with the same chain of traditionaries with the addition, "And Canaan (*Kan'ān*), who is the one who drowned [in the Flood]. The Arabs call him Yām." Muhammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, Egypt: Dār al-Ma'ārif, *no date*, vol. 1/191.

[209] John G. Jackson. *Introduction to African Civilizations*, New York: Citadel Press, 1994, p. 66.

This as well as Jackson's earlier quotes highlight just how volatile the racial categories have and can be. It reveals how those categories are largely "convenient" terms of group identification. They often do not take into consideration the difference in language and other cultural markers used by the very people being described to distinguish themselves from outsiders.

As will be noted later, the definition of the Caucasian included those of North Africa. And by the 19th century certain anthropologists divided whites into three groups, which included Mediterranean "Whites." As for the "backward" Blacks termed "Negroes", as I have tried to explain numerous times before, these were primarily Blacks of East African origin further south of the lands of Abyssinia. Their description in the ancient Arab and European ethnographies was as a people who were "uncivilized", "naked", "unattractive", "cannibalistic", and "unintelligent" among other things.[212] The early Arab encounters with these people was limited to East Africa who they referred to as the "Zanj." With time, however, the Zanj region was acknowledged as extending across Africa all the way to the west coast.[213]

But returning to Goldenberg's assertion that the "Curse of Ham" was promulgated during the Arab Muslim conquest of North Africa in the 7th century, one must consider that it was not until close to the first quarter of the 8th century that the massive campaign to codify the prophetic tradition under the Umayyad caliph, Umar II (101/720) was launched. Though the oral transmission of the said traditions is possible, this can only be considered speculation if the works, which collected such traditions, did not take form until the 9th century at the earliest. This would be a difference of two centuries although it indicates that Muslim acquaintance with the myth happened much earlier than one might assume.

---

[210] 'Abd Al-Rahman al-Suyūṭī. *Raf' Sha'n al-Ḥubshān*, Cairo: Al-Mu'allif, 1991, p. 68.

[211] 'Abd Al-Rahman b. al-Jawzī. *Tanwīr al-Ghabash fī Faḍl al-Sūdān wa al-Ḥabash*, Riyadh: Dar al-Sharif, 1998, p. 34.

[212] Unknown Author (Yūsuf al-Hādi Edition). *Ḥudūd al-'Ālam min al-Sharq ilā al-Gharb*, Cairo: Al-Dār Al-Thaqāfiyyah li al-Nashr, 1999, p. 145.

[213] Ahmad Al-Fayyūmī . *Al-Misbāḥ Al-Munīr*, Beirut: Al-Maktabah Al-'Asriyyah, 1997, p. 134.

Even though some Muslim scholars did not readily accept the "Curse" connected to the story of Noah's three sons, it does appear that they generally accepted the tripartite division of human races, and that most earth's inhabitants today are in some way or another the progeny of Noah. Hence, we observe Al-Nawwawī's earlier statement about the Ethiopians' descent from Ham. On the other hand, the previous tradition stating "I was dispatched to the red and the black" suggests a binary division of race, which Al-Jāḥiẓ acknowledged as being the highest level of racial classification.

Despite knowing of the protection given to early Arab Muslims by the Negus of Abyssinia, one can garner from the writings of several literati an Axumite-Arabian shared disdain, which predated Islam. The literatus, Al-Jāḥiẓ, in his *Fakhr al-Sūdān 'alā al-Bīdān* underscores examples of Arab disparagement of the black African phenotype, which solicits African responses, which at times berate certain Arab tribes for the practice of bestiality.[214]

Arab stereotypes for Africans included excessive merriment, brute strength, alarming appearance; plus, generosity and good nature, which they attributed to weak intelligence as was the opinion of not only the Greek Galen, but of Arabs like Al-Mas'ūdī, Al-Kindī, and the unknown author of a medieval history entitled *The Limits of the World*. In response, Al-Jāḥiẓ celebrated the Negro fondness for melody, physical strength, and intimidating appearance. Speaking hyperbolically, he said,

> There is no nation on the earth with tougher physiques or greater physical strength than them. A single man can lift a boulder, which an entire group of bedouins and others lack the strength to lift. And they are brave with tough physiques and magnanimous. These are the traits of nobility.[215]

As for the accusation of being unintelligent in light of their magnanimity, Al-Jāḥiẓ decries it with great outrage, saying, "Then, let it be that those with the most abundant intelligence and knowledge are those who are the most miserly and ill-natured."[216] He further adds that such conclusions result only from the fact that Arabs have only seen the uncivilized Negroes of Qunbulah, but not the civilized Linjawān. Rather, according to Al-Jāḥiẓ,

---

[214] 'Abd Al-Salām Muhammad Hārūn. *Rasā'il Al-Jāḥiẓ*, "Fakhr al-Sūdān", Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānijī, 1964, vol. 1/182-185.

[215] 'Abd Al-Salām Muhammad Hārūn. *Rasā'il Al-Jāḥiẓ*, "Fakhr al-Sūdān", Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānijī, 1964, vol. 1/195.

[216] 'Abd Al-Salām Muhammad Hārūn. *Rasā'il Al-Jāḥiẓ*, "Fakhr al-Sūdān", Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānijī, 1964, vol. 1/196.

Arabs only have encountered the captives, slaves, and riffraff of the coasts of Qunbulah "who possess neither beauty nor intelligence."[217]

Evidence of Afro-Arabian intermarriage was so normative that all one needs to do is have a look at the lists of the many companions of the Prophet with African mothers. This fact did not impair their Arabness. Those with African mothers included the Qurashite chieftain 'Amr b. al-'Ās, who opened up Egypt as well as his uterine brother 'Uqbah b. 'Āmir, who further colonized North Africa thereafter. This custom of intermarriage, however, appears to have changed after Islam.

While the "Curse of Ham" was popular among early Muslim scholars, there is scant evidence that it contributed to the notion of black presumptive servitude as it did during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This undermines the claims made by Goldenberg about the theory of the curse becoming popular during 7th century Arab incursions into North Africa. The rejection of the theory and declaration of all anti-black hadiths to be spurious by major scholars like Ibn Khaldun and Ibn al-Jawzī pose a major challenge to Goldenberg's assertion. Other stereotypes, which originally accosted the Negro or Zanj people of sub-Saharan East Africa for their lack of civilization indeed appear to have been pervasive. And, it seems likely that these ideas played more of a role in black antipathy than the curse, as did the general xenophobic nature of premodern cultures.

Non-"Zanjī" and "brown" Afro-Arabians, having their own self-definitions, naturally, saw themselves as distinct from the "uncivilized" Negroes (*Zanj*). This cognitive disassociation may have helped make it tolerable for Afro-Arabians and non-"Zanjī" Africans to overlook discriminatory laws and opinions expressed by certain Mālikī scholars.

The 19th century Egyptian Mālikī jurist, Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Ṣawī (1241/1825), attempting to reconcile between conflicting reports in his commentary on a theological tract entitled *Jawharah al-Tawḥīd* (*The Jewel of Divine Unicity*) about the Qur'ānic personage, Luqmān, the wise, who is described by some as having been a Nubian slave prophet, says,

> It is also compulsory for a messenger [of God] to be a human being—of neither the sprites (*Jinn*) nor the angels, to be male, not female..., and to be free, not a slave. As for the view that Luqmān was a prophet in spite of being a slave, it means that he had brown skin resembling that of slaves.[218]

---

[217] 'Abd Al-Salām Muhammad Hārūn. *Rasā'il Al-Jāḥiẓ*, "Fakhr al-Sūdān", Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānijī, 1964, vol. 1/211.

[218] Ahmad b. Muhammad Al-Ṣāwī. *Kitāb Sharḥ al-Ṣāwī 'alā Jawharah al-Tawḥīd,* Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2009, p. 278.

According to Al-Ṣawī, inhumanity, femininity, and bondage are all disqualifiers from legitimate consideration as an emissary of God. Consequently, neither angel nor sprite, and neither woman nor slave may be considered for prophecy. These conditions, though, are subsidiary to the more widely accepted essential qualities of an apostle of God in normative Ash'arī doctrine, which are sagacity (*faṭānah*), moral rectitude (*amānah*), honesty (*ṣidq*), and loyalty to the mission (*tablīgh*). There is consensus on these qualities among Ash'aris, while the auxiliary conditions alluded to by Al-Ṣawī are the subject of disagreement. In Al-Ṣawī's effort to exonerate this venerated personage from the flaw of physical servitude to other humans, it is quite unfortunate that he would simultaneously reinforce an understanding that all slaves are "brown." Was he speaking of an historical reality wherein only Blacks or Browns were slaves?[219] Or was he merely echoing the sentiments of his own age when chattel slavery had become associated with Blacks in the collective imaginary? Though well intended, I believe we must acknowledge that human frailty embraces even sages in spite of their spiritual greatness. Their susceptibility to influence by popular trends and cultural outlooks that militate against Islam's anti-racist ideal is no different than it is for any common person. However, what is one to say of the idea of "black" or [more appropriately] "African" presumptive servitude? Does Al-Ṣāwī's viewpoint connect in some remote fashion with his reading of early Islamic history?

Goldenberg further says,

> The Arab conquests also had another consequence. Where skin color in Arabic literature previously described personal complexion, it is now used to designate ethnic groups, with "black" referring to the dark-skinned peoples. The same phenomenon occurred in sixteenth-century England.[220]

There is evidence for Goldenberg's claim here. For, a perusal of the canon of Muslim prophetic traditions reveals that early narrators when making mention of dark-skinned Arabs, would characterize one as a "black" Arab. On the other hand, when speaking of an African, their geographic origin would seldom be mentioned, sufficing to state merely that something happened with a "black" man or woman.

---

[219] This is also significant in that, as historians and lexicographers have stated, most Arabs were brown and black. If that is so, Al-Ṣāwī's suggestion would mean that most Arabs, likewise, resembled slaves.

[220] David M. Goldenberg. *The Curse of Ham*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 197.

As already highlighted, anti-black/anti-African sentiment predated Islam and continued under the regulatory eye of the Prophet. In his scolding of the companion, Abū Dharr, for racist language;[221] the reprimand of the sons of Bukayr for their refusal to marry their sister to Bilal;[222] the struggle to

---

[221] The narration in Muslim states that Abū Dharr said the following,

> ...[Negative] words were exchanged between me and one of my brothers whose mother was a non-Arab, so I insulted him by mentioning his mother [negatively]. So, he lodged a complaint against me to the Prophet—God's blessing and peace on him—and once I encountered the Prophet—God's blessing and peace on him—he said: "O Abū Dharr! You are a person still possessed of traits from the time of ignorance." I said, "O God's Messenger! Whoever reviles men also reviles their fathers and mothers [by default]!" He said [to me]: "O Abū Dharr! You are a person still possessed of traits from the time of ignorance.

Although this narration does not explicitly state who the person insulted by Abū Dharr was, Al-Nawwawī states in his commentary that, "...it has been said that this man who was reviled was Bilal, the *mu'adhdhin*." (See Yahyā b. Sharaf al-Nawwawī. *Sharh Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 6: 1/111-112 "Kitāb al-Aymān," Chapter 10). Al-Mundhirī, however, is more explicit regarding who this man was whereas he says, "...and the man who Abū Dharr insulted was Bilal b. Rabāḥ, the *mu'adhdhin* of God's Messenger—God's blessing and peace on him." (See Muhammad Sharaf b. Amīr al-'Aẓīm Ābādī.*'Awn Al-Ma 'būd 'alā Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 'Amman: Bayt al-Afkār al-Dawliyyah, *no date*), p. 2198, Ḥadīth #124 of "Kitāb al-Adab"). Al-Suyūṭī reports that the Prophet Muhammad turned away in disgust from Abū Dharr after hearing of what he said to Bilal. (See Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd Al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī. *Raf' Sha'n al-Ḥubshān*, Egypt: Al-Mu'allif, no date), p. 276.)

[222] Qāḍī Abū Bakr b. al-'Arabī' relates in his *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*,

> Bilal asked for the hand of the daughter of Al-Bukayr, but her brothers refused. So, Bilal complained, "O God's Messenger! So much [offense] have I encountered from the sons of Al-Bukayr! I asked for their sister's hand in marriage, and they denied me and insulted me!" The Prophet—God's blessing and peace on him—then became angry for the sake of Bilal, and the news reached them. They, thereafter, went to their sister complaining, "Look how much we have encountered because of you! God's Messenger—God's blessing and peace on him—is angry with us because of Bilal!" She replied [to them], "My affair is in the hand of God's Messenger—God's blessing and peace on him." Then, he (the Prophet) married her off to Bilal." (See Qāḍī Abū Bakr Muhammad b. Al-'Arabī'. *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1988, vol. 4/160). Al-Suyūṭī also reports this incident in *Raf' Sha'n al-Ḥubshān*, adding that the sons of Bukayr requested from the Messenger to marry their sister to three different men, and on each occasion, he asked them, "Where are things with Bilal?" After the third time, the Prophet added, "Where are you from a man who is among the

put a stop to gossip concerning the possible infidelity of the wife of Zayd b. Ḥārithah for birthing him a son of dark color (Usāmah);[223] and his reminders on the day of the Meccan conquest of the fact that all people were created from dirt in response to comments about the "black crow" climbing the Ka'bah to make the call to assemble,[224] the Prophet Muhammad proved himself to be a man of action, justice, and courage. As a matter of fact, the Prophet's dying commitment was to create a world wherein the content of character played the most prominent role in determining the relative humanity of a person.

If scholars like Al-Sāwī believed servitude to be a particularly dehumanizing and contemptible characteristic in a human being, his likes would have preferred not to impugn an entire population of people with presumptive slavehood. This is in light of the belief that Islam came to liberate rather than enslave people, a thing best articulated by Caliph Umar I when addressing an injustice committed by the son of his governor of Egypt, 'Amr b. al-'Ās, "When did you turn people into slaves after their mothers bore them free?"[225]

While Islamic jurisprudence appropriated slavery as a normative system, it also normalized the paths to freedom. Declarations like those made by the caliph and Al-Sawi's statement regarding the dejected state of the slave

---

people of Paradise?" On this time, they consented to the wedding. (See Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd Al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī. *Raf' Sha'n al-Ḥubshān*, Egypt: Al-Mu'allif, *no date*, pp. 275-76).

[223] The story of Usāmah b. Zayd is reported in several of the major hadith canons, including those of Al-Bukhārī and Muslim. After Zayd's divorce from his wife, Zaynab, he married the Prophet Muhammad's former caretaker, Umm Ayman, who was a dark black woman from Abyssinia. They gave birth to Usāmah b. Zayd, who was described as black although his father inclined towards whiteness. Consequently, chatter started in the community that Umm Ayman was, perhaps, unfaithful. This not only troubled the couple. It also troubled the Prophet until one day a man by the name Mujazziz al-Mudlijī, a known physiognomist, passed through Medina, noticed the feet of Zayd and Usāmah both protruding from beneath a blanket that concealed their heads, and then said, "Undoubtedly, some of these feet come from the others." This caused the Prophet to rejoice, especially since the pre-Islamic Arabs considered the judgment of the physiognomist (qā'if) to be authoritative. (See Yaḥyā b. Sharaf Al-Nawwawī. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi Sharḥ al-Nawwawī*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995, vol. 5/2/35). Ibn al-Jawzī in his *Adl* describes Zayd as "a short dark brown Arab with a pudgy nose." If this description is true, it would undermine the authenticity of the above account. (See Ibn al-Jawzī, *Tanwīr al-Ghabash*, Riyadh: Dār al-Sharīf, 1998, p. 131).

[224] Abū 'Īsā Al-Tirmidhī. *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, Damascus: Dār al-Fayhā', *no date*, p. 743, Ḥadīth #3270.

[225] 'Abd Al-'Azīz Ibrāhīm al-'Umarī. *Al-Wilāyah 'alā al-Buldān fī 'Asr al-Khulafā' al-Rāshidīn*, Riyadh: Dār Ishbīliyyah, 2001, pp. 109-110.

suggest that attitudes about the immorality of slavery did not start during the abolition period in the Americas. As a matter of fact, some claim that the normalization of slavery in the Islamic tradition was the result of Muslim governors exploiting the religious teachings. Scholars like the Senegalese mystic, Amadu Bamba (1853-1927), in the 19th century staunchly opposed Muslim betrayal of Islam's teachings which did not allow for Muslims to enslave other Muslims, a phenomenon which was widespread during his time.[226] But, even before Bamba, the Almaami Abdul-Qadir Kan (1725-1806) effectively put an end to enslavement of Muslims by other Muslims in Senegambia long before slavery was abolished in Europe and the Americas sometime prior to 1787.[227] One of the things that prompted him to abolish both slavery and the slave trade was the targeted enslavement of African scholars. He, consequently, declared that any person capable of reciting the Qur'ān would be set free, just as he promised freedom for any slave who accepted Islam.[228]

Again, as underscored before, Arabs prior to Islam considered Africans to be compatible mates. And, there is ample evidence of hybridity, especially in southern Arabia and Yemen. That later changed, perhaps, due to the circulation of apocryphal traditions reputing Africans to be unfit mates and creatures of inordinate passion, but more likely due to the pervasiveness of stereotypes regarding sub-Saharan lack of civilization. This is in addition to the generally xenophobic nature of premodern cultures. By the time of the Enlightenment period, like so many European Christians, some Muslim scholars, like Al-Ṣāwī, though not explicitly, did at least insinuate the presumptive bonded status of "brown" people.

---

[226] Cheikh Anta Babou. *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853-1913*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, pp. 58-60.

[227] According to Rudolph Ware, "Evidence suggests that in 1787, when the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade held its first meeting in London to *discuss* how gradually to end the trade, the Almaami 'Abdul-Qadir Kan had already abolished it in Senegambia."

Rudolph T. Ware III. *The Walking Qur'ān: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Caroline Press, 2014, p. 114.

[228] Rudolph T. Ware III. *The Walking Qur'ān: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Caroline Press, 2014, p. 134.

CHAPTER 5

Slavery: From Africa to Arabia

Slavery existed in practically every society for millennia prior to the rise of western abolitionism. The causes of bondage were many and sundry, and people often volunteered to become slaves due to subsistence and debt concerns. Islam tolerated this ubiquitous norm but endorsed enslavement only as a potential punishment for prisoners of war. Captives were not the only casualties to slave status. Their children could be subjected to bondage as well, as could their wives who could lawfully be taken as concubines by their Muslim captors.

Under this world order the vanquished could be enslaved for the remainder of their lives. This appears to have been one of the most common ways of becoming a slave. There were, however, other conditions that led people into servitude. They included: 1) raids of villages where its dwellers would be kidnapped, sold, or forced into bondage; 2) deportations resulting from court judgments of corrupt governors seeking rewards from slave traders; 3) debt bondage wherein a person would place himself at the mercy of his creditors due to lack of funds to defray the debts; and 4) resource scarcity such that families would place themselves at the service of landowners and others in exchange for subsistence.[229]

In this chapter, our primary concern is not with the question of what type of slavery was allowed in Islam, but, rather, why do African slaves appear to proliferate in Arabian society prior to and during the prophetic era as opposed to those of European or Persian ancestry? Abyssinian slaves toiled as an oppressed labor class prior to the advent of Islam, and practically all the elite Meccans owned Abyssinian slaves. Although proximity to Arabia is offered by Professor David Goldenberg as an explanation for the proliferation of African slaves in Arabia at the time as opposed to elsewhere,[230] this reasoning is insufficient, since Persia and Byzantium also bordered Arabia. One could ask the obvious question of why proximity does not justify a proliferation of Byzantine or Persian slaves on the peninsula as well. Proximity undoubtedly played a role. But, proximity alone does not explain why there appears to have been a more significant number of African slaves in Arabia compared to slaves from other parts of the world.

---

[229] Michael L. Conniff. *Africans in the Americas: A History of the Black Diaspora*, Caldwell, New Jersey: The Blackburn Press, 1994, pp. 41-45.

A more plausible explanation for the proliferation of African slaves takes into consideration three important factors: First, as related by Muslim sources, after the miraculous decimation of the Abyssinian army led by the Axumite commander Abraha al-Ashram the surviving soldiers were taken captive by the Meccan idolaters. According to one account the Prophet Muhammad's nanny, Umm Ayman, being part of the war spoils fell to the lot of his grandfather, Abd Al-Muṭṭalib.[231] Second, according to the Muslim historian Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (310/923), the Sasanian king Khosrow I, known also as Anushirvan (501-579), seeking to reclaim Yemen for Persia, sent four thousand soldiers on a campaign of ethnic cleansing against all Abyssinians remaining in Yemen, any children of theirs birthed by Arab women, and "all kinky-haired men."[232] This campaign came on the heels of the reassertion of Abyssinian authority over the region following the murder of the Yemeni leader, Sayf b. Dhī Yazan , by his Axumite slaves. It was Sayf who originally summoned the support of the Persian Khosrow against the remaining Axumite forces, which gave him the upper hand in exchange for tribute paid to the Sassanians until his murder. Third, the basic principles of supply and demand proliferated the purchase of a number of African slaves from the continent. Enslavement through kidnap is also likely to have figured into enlarging the slave force. The Prophet's companion and adopted son Zayd b. Ḥārithah, after all, is believed to have been kidnapped and forced into servitude as a young boy.[233]

---

[230] Goldenberg says, "Although there was probably a greater proportion of black Africans among the slaves in Arabia than elsewhere due to geographical proximity and the established trade routes, there is no clear proof that most slaves were black Africans."

David M. Goldenberg. *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 196.

[231] 'Abd Al-Rahman b. al-Jawzī. *Tanwīr al-Ghabash fī Faḍl al-Sūdān wa al-Ḥabash*, Riyadh: Dār al-Sharīf, 1998, p. 148.

[232] Muhammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī: Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, Muhammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm ed., Egypt: Dār al-Ma'ārif, *no date*, vol. 2/142-148.

Like other societies around the world, slaves were a regular fixture in Arabia prior to, during, and after the appearance of the Arabian prophet. The most popular of all of them during the Islamic period was Bilal b. Rabāh, who was set free by Prophet Muhammad's temporal successor, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq. Bilal was the first *muadhdhin*, or person assigned the role of making the public announcements for communal prayers and other gatherings. He also served as guardian of the Muslim treasury. The Prophet incorporated him as well as a few other non-Arabs into his inner circle. That notwithstanding, Bilal, like the others, were generally viewed as ethnic outsiders despite being born and raised in Arabia. According to the Muslim historian Balādhurī (279/892), Bilal was the child of two Abyssinian slaves, Rabāḥ and Ḥamāmah.[234] Very little seems to be known about his father beyond his name and his slave status. His mother Ḥamāmah was a believer, as were Bilal 's brother Khālid and sister 'Ufayrah. They suffered the harshest persecution, as did Arabs who lacked the protection of the clans in Mecca during the early period.

Interestingly, Sumayyah bt. Khuyyāt, Islam's first martyr and mother of 'Ammār b. Yāsir, was an Abyssinian woman who was a former slave of the Meccan noble Abū Hudhayfah b. al-Mughīrah al-Makhzūmī. Yāsir, 'Ammār's father, who was not a slave, was from Yemen, and therefore, easily excluded from his clan's protection once he decided to relinquish the Meccan pantheon through his acceptance of Islam.

Former slaves were not always in an unfortunate social position. They participated in wars, and at times ascended to the upper echelons of society. Mihya' b. Ṣāliḥ, a black freed slave of 'Umar b. al-Khattāb, the second caliph, was the first casualty during the first major battle of the Muslim revolutionary war at Badr, an incident reminiscent of the sacrifice of Crispus Attucks during the American Revolution.[235] Usāmah b. Zayd b. al- Ḥārithah served as the youngest commander of the Muslim armed forces being only 18 when he assumed the position prior to the Prophet's death. The 13th century Iraqi scholar Ibn al-Jawzī describes Usāmah's father Zayd as a black man with a "pudgy nose." Usāmah's mother, Umm Ayman, was a former Abyssinian slave and the nanny of the Prophet Muhammad in his youth.[236]

---

[233] 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī. *Tanwīr al-Ghabash fī Faḍl al-Sūdān wa al-Ḥabash*, Marzūq 'Ali Ibrāhīm ed., Riyadh: Dār al-Sharīf, 1998, p. 131.

[234] Ahmad b. Yaḥyā Al-Balādhurī. *Kitāb Jumal min Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, Maktab al-Buhūth wa Dirāsāt ed., Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1996, p. 209.

[235] 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī. *Tanwīr al-Ghabash fī Faḍl al-Sūdān wa al-Ḥabash*, Marzūq Ali Ibrāhīm ed., Riyadh: Dār al-Sharīf, 1998, p. 130.

Blacks served as military slaves in Egypt during Abbasid rule, especially during the reign of Ahmad b. Ṭūlūn (835-884 CE), a Turkish slave solider himself, who took on several black slave soldiers. During the Ikhshīd dynasty (935-969 CE) Abū al-Misk Kāfūr al-Ikhshīdī, an Abyssinian freed slave, ruled Egypt and the Levant (966-969 CE) after his appointment by his former king master.[237]

An interesting fact about slavery in the Muslim world is not only that former slaves could achieve social mobility at times. Their integrity was also not impugned by their former slave status. For this reason, former slaves are authorities in numerous hadiths. The Prophet's companion Abū Bakrah is believed to have narrated 132 hadiths. His mother Sumayyah was a Byzantine slave taken as a captive of war and then gifted to her new master Al-Hārith b. Kaladah al-Thaqafī. Sumayyah as Al-Hārith's concubine birthed for him Nāfi' and Abū Bakrah, whose name was Nufay‘. Al-Ḥārith, reportedly, denied paternity to Abū Bakrah once he saw his black skin, insisting that Sumayyah had been unfaithful with Al- Ḥārith's African slave Masrūh. For this reason, according to one account, when asked Abū Bakrah would tell people that his true name was Nufay‘ b. Masrūḥ (son of Masrūḥ). It is related that Abū Bakrah begot 40 children and left behind seven. Al-Suyūṭī said, "His children in Basra were honored with great wealth, knowledge, and offices (*walāyāt*)."[238]

Even if it could be asserted that the Arabian slave force was not predominantly African, that scores of Africans living in Arabia under Islamic rule were freed slaves gives ample reason to suspect the claim of their preponderance in the Meccan slave force to be factual, as alleged by Goldenberg. But, this is not a logical necessity, since evidence would need to be established that the majority of other foreigners living in Arabia at that time were free.

As already noted, despite slavery's challenges for slaves, hope and opportunity for social inclusion and ascendancy for those who were manumitted were pervasive under Muslim rule. During his siege on the town of Ṭā'if, the Prophet promised freedom to any slaves who surrendered and descended from their fortresses. On the following morning (*bukrah*), Nufay‘ b. Masrūh surrendered himself to the Muslim forces. It is said that this decision was how he earned the surname, "Abū Bakrah" ("Father of the Morning").[239] In another opinion, however, it was because he scaled down the wall unto the back of a young, she camel (*bakrah*).[240] Rumors that the Prophet never killed any of his followers facilitated this decision although after slight vacillation.

---

[236] ‘Abd Al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī. *Tanwīr al-Ghabash fī Faḍl al-Sūdān wa al-Ḥabash*, Marzūq Ali Ibrāhīm ed., Riyadh: Dār al-Sharīf, 1998, p. 148.

[237] ‘Abd Al-Ra⊠mān Suyū⊠ī. *Raf‘ Sha'n al-Ḥubshān*, Cairo: Mu'allif, 1991, pp. 260-264.

[238] ‘Abd Al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī. *Raf‘ Sha'n al-Ḥubshān*, ‘Abd Al-Wahhāb Faḍl ed., Cairo: Al-Mu'allif, 1991, p. 296.

That notwithstanding, former slaves were not always so fortunate. The slave poet Suḥaym could not contain his passionate love for his master's daughter and was, resultantly, burned alive. Prior to that, when he was offered as a gift to 'Uthman b. 'Affān, the latter responded, "I have no need of him. Send him back. The most that will come of this slave poet is that when he's sated he'll cajole their women, and when he's hungry he'll vilify them (i.e. the men)."[241]

This report is reminiscent of the earlier one which says of the black slave (*al-'abd al-aswad*) that he, "steals when he's hungry and fornicates when he's sated."[242] Another version substitutes "the black slave" with the more (or less) inclusive "Negro" (*Zanjī*). Presuming the soundness of 'Uthmān's report, one might conclude that his statement was falsely attributed to the Prophet. On the other hand, a more likely probability is that 'Uthmān's statement was corrupted and then ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad. While 'Uthmān's statement expresses contempt for the characteristic "cajoling" and "vilification" of poets, the second report suggests an inseparable connection between "blackness" and moral corruption.

The Qur'ān teaches that the Muslim victors in any battle have the option of freely releasing prisons of war or in exchange for a ransom (Q 47:4). In the Prophetic tradition, there were instances where prisoners of war were executed. This latter precedent established the legal right to kill prisoners under certain conditions, a punishment which is clearly less severe than execution. The enslavement of free people is absolutely forbidden in Islamic law. And as stated before, the only path to slavery endorsed by the Prophet was through captivity resulting from warfare. Muslim jurists would add a second legitimating path to bondage, which was when two slaves give birth to a child. The crime committed by prisoners of war justifying their bondage would appear to be murder, attempted murder, kidnap, attempted kidnap, pillaging, or some other violation. And as the 13th amendment of the US Constitution tolerates "involuntary servitude" as "a punishment for a crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted," the Islamic law countenanced slavery—minus the abusive and inhumane treatment popular during the Transatlantic slave trade—for similar intelligible reasons.

---

[239] Ibn al-Jawzī, *Tanwīr al-Ghabash*, Marzūq Ali Ibrāhīm ed., Riyadh: Dār al-Sharīf, 1998, p. 133.

[240] Ibn Hajar Al-'Asaqlānī. *Al-Iṣābah fī Tamyīz Al-Ṣaḥābah*. Beirut: Al-Maktabah Al-'Aṣriyyah, 2012, p. 1023 entry #8907.

[241] 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī. *Tanwīr al-Ghabash fī Faḍl al-Sūdān wa al-Ḥabash*, Marzūq Ali Ibrāhīm ed., Riyadh: Dār al-Sharīf, 1998, p. 164.

[242] Muhammad b. 'Abd Al-Raḥmān Al-Sakhāwī. *Al-Maqāṣid Al-Ḥasanah*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1979, p. 111.

Amazingly when reflecting on this earlier time when slavery was universally accepted, those who were in bondage often would avoid attempts to escape. There are many stories of slave owners sending off their slaves on business ventures only to have those slaves return with the profits they were sent out to return with. The *kul/harem* order of the Ottomans which produced influential military slaves and powerful harem mistresses is at times portrayed as a status envied by the poor—but free—people living under Turkish rule. Of course, this is not to say that all slaves and that any form of slavery produced a utopian reality or vision. Nor is the suggestion that revolts did not occur from time to time. The 9th century Zanj Rebellion of East African slaves in Iraq (869-883 CE) is one of the clearest proofs that mistreatment did indeed happen in Islamic territories as well. The point is merely that when certain practices are so normative in the collective psyches of people, history has shown over and over that humans possess an ability to endure, tolerate, overcome, and adapt to adverse and extremely unpleasant conditions.

Why Was There No Islamic Emancipation Proclamation?

The Qur'ān treats the liberation of slaves as a moral good, encouraging manumission (Q 24:33), praising those who set slaves free (Q 90:11-13), and prescribing it as an atonement for certain violations (Q 58:3). But the Qur'ān never seems to categorically condemn slavery especially considering its apparent tolerance for concubinage. Chattel slavery today is considered one of the dark marks in human history, and the West takes great pride in having abolished it. If this is so, one may wonder why neither the Qur'ān nor the Prophet Muhammad unequivocally abolished? Clearly, Muslim countries like Mauritania and Sudan only abolished slavery late in the 20th century.[243] And while several Muslim countries followed the lead of the West during the golden age of abolition, others like Turkey seem to have been largely incentivized by internal concerns.[244] Almaami Abdul-Qadir Kan of

---

[243] Ronald Segal. *Islam's Black Slaves: The Other Black Diaspora*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001, pp. 199-223.

[244] Even though access to African slaves became limited for Turkish domestic slave demands due to British abolition efforts, Ottoman incentives to abolish slavery seem to have related more to attempts to mitigate internal strife amongst

Senegambia pursued a liberal policy of manumitting any slave discovered to profess Islam and outlawed the slave trade even before any European country.[245] This decision, however, was not an absolute condemnation of slavery and the slave trade. The primary concern was the unjustified enslavement of Muslims.

That said, I believe it important to begin with a reminder that today's universal moral outrage over slavery results primarily from the grotesqueness of what happened during the Middle Passage and beyond. It is difficult not to conjure up the image of a black African, their savage treatment, and the decision to restrict slavery to Blacks whenever the word "slave" is mentioned. During the life of Islam's Prophet and beyond, a significant number of Arabia's slaves were also black Africans, but there was no general law or understanding that only they could be slaves as it was the case in the Americas.

Slaves in the Americas were generally not allowed to marry. They could not own property. Because they were considered property, they could be bought and sold at will even to the point of being separated from their children. There were no laws protecting slaves from physical abuse. And slave owners had no legal obligation to feed them, clothe them, or to provide them with adequate living quarters. There was little difference between the treatment of slaves and animals. And sometimes their treatment was worse than how people treated their blood hounds. The most significant abuse was psychological in nature. Slaves were prevented from learning to read or write. They were forced to relinquish their cultural norms, their religious observances, and beliefs. They were forced to change their names to identify them with being the property of those families to whom they were subservient. They were barred from the knowledge of their past, told that they were worthless, and historically contributed nothing to civilization. Furthermore, they were taught that they were naturally unequal to Whites in every way.

---

its Circassian refugee population of slaveowners and slave population. According to Ehud R. Toledano, "Unlike the prohibition of the African slave trade—which owed a great deal to British pressure—reforms concerning Circassian slavery were, for the most part, the result of Ottoman initiative." See Ehud R. Toledano. *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East*, Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1998, p. 82.

[245] See the comments of Reverend Thomas Clarkson (1760-1846), co-founder of The Society of Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, about Almaami Abdul-Qadir Kan in Professor Rudolph Ware's *The Walking Qur'ān*. Rudoph T. Ware III, *The Walking Qur'ān: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014, pp. 112-115.

Slavery for much of our history was ubiquitous. Not only did Whites enslave Blacks, but Blacks also enslaved Blacks. Africans enslaved other Africans, Europeans other Europeans, etc. This was all prior to the spread of the doctrine that solidified the fate of Black people as presumptive slaves in both the Americas and other parts of the "civilized" Christian world. This would, eventually, happen as well in certain Muslim countries, although it was never an overt policy *de jure*.

Returning to why neither the Qur'ān nor the Prophet Muhammad abolished slavery, let us reflect on the following: Firstly, as in the Western tradition, slaves were considered the rightful property of their owners even though the Qur'ān is less explicit about this than most books on Islamic jurisprudence. Secondly, a person could only become a slave through capture during a time of war. Thirdly, only non-Muslim opponents could be forced into bondage even though Muslims did not always live up to this ideal. Fourthly, anyone could become a slave, not only black Africans. Lastly, slaves could be bought or sold but family members could not be separated from one another, nor could a family member be the slave of another family member.

Slavery in Islam required that slave owners have the material capacity to feed, clothe, and provide shelter to his slaves. The owner was obligated to feed and clothe his/her slaves from the same quality of food and clothing one provided for oneself. Prophet Muhammad said, "Feed them from what you eat, and clothe them from what you wear."[246] The Prophet also outlawed the punishment and abuse of slaves, saying in his Farewell Pilgrimage, "If they commit a sin that you deem to be unforgiveable then sell the slaves of God. But do not punish them."[247]

Slaves could not be forced to change their names. They were allowed to own wealth, and to offer their services to other people with the permission of their owners. They were allowed to marry, and the Qur'ān encouraged slave owners to find compatible mates for them (Q 24:32). A believing slave's worth was treated as equal to that of a free believer if the slave's freedom was purchased in lieu of the accidental murder of a free believer (Q 4:92).

Slave owners could not refer to themselves as "masters" (*asyād*). Rather, they were to refer to themselves as "patrons" (*mawālī*), and a slave had to be referred to as "girl" (*jāriyah, fatāh*) or a "boy" (*ghulām, fatā*), not as "my slave" (*'abdī*).[248] A slave could buy his/her freedom, and several options for manumission existed (Q 24:33). The Qur'ān upheld manumission as a moral ideal (Q 90: 12-13), as earlier stated. Additionally, Islam incentivized slave owners to free their slaves by investing them with the right to inherit wealth left by their former slaves if the latter died during the life of their former owners without heirs. The Prophet said, "Patronage is the sole right of the one who manumits."[249]

---

[246] Yaḥyā b. Sharaf al-Nawwawī. *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995, vol. 9/2/108, hadith #3007.

[247] Muhammad b. Sa'd al-Zuhrī. *Tabaqāt Ibn Sa'd*, Dr. Ali 'Umar ed., Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānijī, 2001, vol. 2/167.

[248] Yahyā b. Sharaf al-Nawwawī. *Sharh Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995,

There are other things to consider, but from the foregoing it appears that the ultimate mission of Prophet Muhammad was to bring salvation to humanity in the Afterlife. In carrying out this mission, he ensured that he gave all the necessary tools and knowledge for every believer to achieve that goal. The most important gift was the knowledge that God only accepts good works when they are done with a pure intention and willfully. The fact that slaves were considered private property of their owners during pre-modern times posed a significant challenge had he proclaimed universal emancipation outlawing the ownership of slaves. The American Civil War reminds us of the potential ramifications of stripping people of their "property" even if it is deemed to be unlawful for them to own. This is not to depreciate the good that has resulted from Lincoln's bravery and conviction concerning America's slaves. But one is left to wonder why there was so much resistance to the upward mobility of Blacks since the time of the Emancipation Proclamation until the passage of substantive civil rights legislation in the 1960's. Government-backed policies, laws, and efforts to undermine Black success since the founding of the United States of America challenge the assertion of an open embrace of abolition and equal citizenship by those in the West. The resistance to change seems to have been, precisely, because property owners were begrudgingly forced to yield over their slaves after more than a century of indoctrination into White race supremacy and Black innate inferiority and subservience. Lincoln's legislation and executive order only dealt with one part of the problem. To secure a lasting peace and progress in American society, it would have taken a significant amount of introspection and mental realignment which would have included Lincoln abandoning even his own belief in the inferiority of Blacks.[250] The other problems that resulted from Lincoln's

---

vol. 8/1/6-7, hadith #2249.

[249] Yahyā b. Sharaf al-Nawwawī. *Sharh Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995, vol. 5/2/114, hadith #1504.

[250] In Lincoln's July 17, 1858 Illinois debate with Senator Stephen A. Douglas, Lincoln, though a staunch abolitionist, had the following to say about Negro enfranchisement,

I have said that I do not understand the Declaration to mean that all men were created equal in all respects. They are not our equal in color...Certainly, the Negro proclamation were that former slaves were left without guarantees of food, shelter, work, security, and at the mercy of former slave owners infuriated by the new arrangement.

What the Prophet Muhammad apparently attempted to do was create a society mentally and emotionally prepared enough to receive former slaves into their midst as equal partners in shaping the overall well-being of public and private life. When a slave owner sees himself not as a "master" (*sayyid*) but as a "patron" (*mawlā*) of his slave, it is easier for one to see ownership of a slave as both a privilege and a responsibility. When one must share one's wealth with one's slave dressing them in similar attire and feeding them with the same quality of food, it is hard to think that one has the right to abuse him/her. Then, when one is given a share in the wealth of one's slave, it is hard to imagine that Prophet Muhammad meant anything more than to promote humane treatment of slaves who were themselves fellow human beings, which would make the transition from slave to non-slave much easier. In doing so, the slave owner guarantees for him/herself a special place in God's heaven in light of the willingness and willful decision to manumit that bondsperson. The bondsperson on the other hand harbors little or no resentment in his heart for his former slave owner who liberates him after relatively humane treatment.

A beautiful example which corroborates this presumption is a story related by 'Abd Allah, son of the Shiite Imam Ja'far al- Ṣādiq (149/766). During a visit to one of the orchards in Medina, he noticed a black slave over one of the plots eating with a dog lying before him. Every time he took a morsel of food, he threw an equal-sized bite to the dog. 'Abd Allah b. Ja'far stood watching until they finished eating, and asked the slave, "Who's your master?" To this the slave responded, "The heirs of 'Uthmān b. 'Affān." After expressing his amazement at what he had observed from the slave, the latter explained that the dog being his companion for years deserved to share half of his food with him adding that, "I am ashamed for God's sake to eat while eyes stare at me without eating as well." 'Abd Allah b. Ja'far later visits his owners, purchases their plots from them for twice their value, and also purchases the slave's freedom. After informing

---

is not our equal in color—perhaps, not in many other respects…What I would most desire is the separation of the white and black races.

("Lincoln, Abraham (1809-1865), Speech of Hon. Abraham Lincoln, Delivered in Springfield, Saturday Evening, July 17, 1858. | The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History." Lincoln, Abraham (1809-1865), Speech of Hon. Abraham Lincoln, Delivered in Springfield, Saturday Evening, July 17, 1858. | The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History. Accessed August 30, 2016.http://www.gilderlehrman.org/collections/09327ad8-2f05-4a00-bfae-612084819312).

the slave of his new status and that he was now the new owner of the plots previously owned by his former masters, the slave responds, "If what you say is true, bear witness that I have endowed this plot for the benefit of the heirs of 'Uthmān."[251]

---

[251] 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī. *Tanwīr al-Ghabash*, Marzūq Ali Ibrāhīm ed., Riyadh: Dār al-Sharīf, 1998, p. 182.

CHAPTER 6

Race, Pre & Post Enlightenment

The phenotypic dissimilarities that exist between people have led several anthropologists to prefer the polygenetic theory which posits that human beings do not all originate from a single prototype. Most members of the Abrahamic faiths, however, believe that humans have a single prototype or monogenetic origin even though the roots of phenotypic variation are difficult to unearth. Among evolutionists, there appears to be a consensus that *homo sapiens* originate from a single hominid. Rather, all life on the Earth is believed to have originated and evolved from a single-celled organism millennia ago.

Arthur Gobineau, the 19th century French anthropologist reputed for his pioneering theories about the Aryan master race, agreed with most anthropologists of his time and members of the Abrahamic faiths regarding the unitarian origins of all peoples.[252] According to Gobineau, "[...] Adam is the ancestor of the white race."[253] He later declares that,

> [...] all civilizations derive from the white race, that none of can exist without its help, and that a society is great and brilliant only

---

[252] Arthur Gobineau. *The Inequality of Human Races,* Adrian Collins ed., New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1915, p. 116.

[253] Though his conclusion concerning the color of the human archetype is uncorroborated by specific scriptural or scientific evidence (therefore, arbitrary), Gobineau proceeds immediately insisting that "[...]it is only an arbitrary interpretation of the text that makes us regard the patriarch Ham as black." Such a statement untying the black race from the curse of Ham could be viewed somewhat flatteringly in the face of Christian dogma of the Middle Passage linking the two together to justify presumptive black slave status. But celebration is ended abruptly upon reading further into *The Inequality of Human Races.*

> so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it, provided that this group itself belongs to the most illustrious branch of our species.[254]

Like many before him, Gobineau traces all human races back to a single progenitor. He conceives not of a possibility for determining the form and nature of the most primitive humanoid (Adam). He does, however, uphold the belief in a tripartite stock division of people who all descend from the progeny of that prototype. In terms like the Biblical framework, Gobineau traces the origin of the current human species back to three distinct archetypal stocks: white, black, and yellow peoples. In the Judeo-Christian tradition [and a particular Muslim anthropological strain which apparently adopts the story from its religious predecessors], the world's repopulation after the great flood of Noah resulted from the seed of Noah's three sons: Japheth, Shem, and Ham. The Qur'ān says of Noah, *"And We made his progeny those who endure"* (Q 37:77). According to this version of history, Japheth would father the European peoples, Shem, the Semites of Asia, and Ham—whose putative Negro origin as alleged by others to which Gobineau objects[255]—the people of Africa. Gobineau's taxonomy of this second stage of human development, though, is distinguished from classical Christian mythology by the inclusion of a yellow race ("the Altaic, Mongol, Finnish, and Tatar branches"), which holds pseudo-primordial status alongside the white and black stocks of the second tier in spite of not having a connection with any of the three children of Noah. Rather, his particular taxonomy amalgamates the progeny of Shem and Japheth into a single category to produce a Eurasian stock, in close agreement with his predecessor, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (d. 1840), who characterized the 'Caucasian' as the peoples of Europe, Eastern Asia, and North Africa.[256] He apparently broke with Blumenbach by restricting the third category of pseudo-primordial men to the "Hamites" of Africa.[257] Unlike Blumenbach, Gobineau also excludes both the Native "red" (aborigines/Amerindians) and Malay stocks from pseudo-primordial consideration, thereby recoiling the former's novel quinquepartite human taxonomy which rendered the quadripartite division of Blumenbach's mentor, Carl Linnaeus (d. 1778), obsolete. The Native [or red] and Malay stocks for Gobineau fall short of pure and primitive status, unlike the other three. But from these three categories come the tertiary, quaternary, and other hybrid divisions of human beings.

---

[254] Arthur Gobineau. *The Inequality of Human Races*, Adrian Collins ed., New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1915, p. 210.

[255] Arthur Gobineau. *The Inequality of Human Races*, edited by Adrian Collins, New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1915, p. 118.

[256] Gobineau's taxonomy also corresponds to that of the early Arabs who according to the popular view classified as "White" those from Byzantium, Syria, and Persia. This would constitute a Eurasian stock. The other category would be the Afro-Asiatic stock if "Black" is said to include the Arabs and black Africans.

[257] Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. *The Anthropological Treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach*, Marx-Wagner-Byndyshe ed., London: The Anthropological Society, 1865, pp. 264-265.

When it comes to the theory of race, Muslim exegetes are nearly unanimous that the Qur'ān is unequivocally monogenetic in that it affirms that all human beings are the progeny of the first man and woman (Adam and Eve), one being the progenitor of the other. The Qur'ān says, *"O mankind! Be conscious of your Lord who created you from one soul and created from it its mate, and then dispersed from them many men and women"* (Q 4:1). Prophet Muhammad said, "Each of you is from Adam. And Adam is from dirt."[258] In other words, there is only one race: the human race. That, of course, is not to imply that there is no phenotypic difference between people, differences by which we perceive of particularity. The Qur'ān also tells us, *"O mankind! Verily, we created you from a male and female, and made you into peoples and tribes to know one another"* (Q 49:13).

The story of the creation of the human species is portrayed in both miraculous and evolutionary terms in the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān says, *"It is He who created you from dust, then from a sperm drop, then from a leech-like clot; then does He get you out (into the light) as a child; then lets you (grow and) reach your age of full strength; then lets you become old"* (Q 40:67). Elsewhere the Qur'ān quotes Noah as he pleads with his people, *"What is the matter with you, that you are not conscious of God's majesty? Seeing that it is He that has created you in diverse states?"* Q 71:15

According to one prophetic tradition, "Verily, God created Adam from a handful taken from the entire surface of the earth. So, the children of Adam came in accord with the earth [from which they were taken]. From them came the red, white, and black; the even plain, the rough terrain, the bad and the good."[259] This report establishes a tertiary division of people according to skin color: red, white, and black. It, however, is unclear if human phenotypic dissimilarity was an Adamic/pre-Noachian phenomenon or post-Noachian as other reports imply, since, according to this origin narrative, the world was repopulated after the flood by the progeny of Noah. Accordingly, the three sons of Noah—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—birth three neo-original "races." According to one tradition quoted in an earlier chapter, "Noah begot Shem whose offspring were a mixture of white and brown; Ham whose sons were a mixture of black and a little white; and Japheth whose [offspring] were a mixture of fair and pale white skin."[260]

---

[258] Muhammad Sharaf b. Amīr al-'Aẓīm Ābādī. *'Awn Al-Ma'būd 'alā Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 'Amman: Bayt al-Afkār al-Dawliyyah, *no date*, p. 2184, hadith #5116.

[259] Muhammad Sharaf b. Amīr al-'Aẓīm Ābādī. *'Awn Al-Ma'būd 'alā Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 'Amman: Bayt al-Afkār al-Dawliyyah, *no date*, p. 2035, hadith #4693. Abū Dāwūd and Abū 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī classify this report as authentic (*Ṣaḥīḥ*).

This report affirms that the tertiary neo-original races are light brown, dark brown, and white instead of black, white, and red as in the previous report. That is unless we interpret "black" to mean "dark brown," "white" as "light brown" (considering Al-Dhahabī's claim that "white" means "wheat-colored"), and "red" as "white" (since Arabs referred to the Europeans, Persians, and Levantines as "red"). Furthermore, it is the offspring of Japheth, rather than those of Shem, who constitute the "whites." In yet another report already mentioned as well, "Noah begot Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Shem begot the Arabs, the Persians, and the Romans, who all possess goodness. Japheth begot Gog and Magog, the Turks, and the Slavs, none who possess goodness. And Ham begot the Copts, the Berbers, and Sudanese."[261] Ignoring the stigma attached to the Turkish peoples and assuming that Persians and Romans were always "whites", this report appears to contradict the other, which alleges "whites" to be the progeny of Japheth instead of Shem.

Al-Mas'ūdī (d. 978) in *Murūj al-Dhahab*, after mentioning up to ten subspecies of "whites" among whom are the Francs, Slavs, Gog and Magog, the Turks, and Caspians, says, "There is no disagreement between researchers among the scholars of the sacred law (*shar'iyyūn*) that all of the nations we have mentioned are from the progeny of Japheth son of Noah."[262]

Whether or not the primordial "races" were either white, black, and red or white, black, and yellow, it appears that major Muslim historians adopted the belief that the people inhabiting the world today are all descendants of Noah from his three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. This offers, perhaps, the oldest Islamic taxonomy of race, which happens to correspond to ideas shared with the Judeo-Christian counterparts of Muslims. Did Muslims simply borrow this origin story from their Abrahamic predecessors or is there reliable evidence supporting this in Muslim sources?

---

[260] Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari. *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī: Tārīkh al-Mulūk wa al-Rusul*, Egypt: Dār al-Ma'ārif, no date, p. 191.

[261] 'Abd Al-Raḥmān Al-Suyūṭī. *Raf' Sha'n al-Ḥubshān*, Cairo: Al-Mu'allif, 1991, p. 64. Ibn Sa'd also reports a version of this hadith which states that the progeny of Shem as mentioned above "all possess goodness." It goes on to list the progeny of Ham and Japheth without mention of whether there is any goodness in them or not as the other hadith does. See Muhammad b. Sa'd b. Māni' al-Zuhrī. *Kitāb al-Tabaqāt al-Kabīr*, Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānijī, 2001, p. 26.ā

[262] 'Ali b. al-Ḥusayn b. Ali al-Mas'ūdī. *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma'ādin al-Jawhar*, 'Abd Al-Hamid ed., Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1973, vol. 2/34.

The Qur'ān says, *"And, indeed, did Noah call out to Us. And how splendid are the responders! And We spared him and his family from the great distress. And We made his progeny those who endure"* (Q 37:75-77). Two very revealing facts emerge from these verses in that they answer the questions of who was spared and who survived? Those spared were "his family", and "his progeny" were those who endured. In another verse the Qur'ān says, *"We, when the water (of Noah's flood) overflowed beyond its limits, carried you, in the floating (Ark)"* (Q 69:11). An important question is, who is the "you" in "We carried you"? Apparently, the Qur'ān is directly addressing all of humanity: us.

Before endorsing the authenticity of the origin story, let us look at a few things which complicate this notion. As for the claim that it was only Noah's progeny who survived, the following Qur'ānic verse calls this into question: *"At length, behold! There came Our command, and the foundations of the earth gushed forth! We said: "Embark therein, of each kind two, male and female, and your family except those against whom the Word has already gone forth, and the believers. But only a few believed with him"* (Q 11:41). The fact that Noah was ordered to bring upon the Ark, two pairs of each creature, his family, and "those who believe" gives the impression that God spared more than simply his sons. As a matter of fact, amongst *"those against whom the decree has been proven"* were Noah's son and wife. The Qur'ān makes no mention of any more sons than the one who perished in the flood. According to Muslim exegetes, his name was Yam, a fourth son.[263] It is from extra-Qur'ānic sources that we learn anything of the other three: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Assuming that those reports are sound, Noah would have, perhaps, boarded the Ark with the three of them, since there is no indication of him having any more than a single wife who, according to the Qur'ān, rejected faith and is assumed to have perished in the flood also being that she was among those *"against whom the Word has already gone forth."*[264] Such people were not to be allowed aboard the Ark.

Muslim exegetes also indicate that after nearing a millennium of preaching, Noah was able to attract scores of people, but their total number did not reach one hundred. If this is true, it would mean that the story of the world's repopulation by the sons of Noah is untenable. Out of logical necessity it would follow as well that there were women aboard (assuming they were not their sisters) who were the mothers of those future offspring. This is precisely what many Muslim exegetes say, that God spared his sons along with their wives.

---

[263] The 13th century exegete, Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373), said of Noah's son who died in the flood, "This is the fourth son whose name is Yam. He was a nonbeliever." Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl b. Kathīr. *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, Beirut: Mu'assassah al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 1996, vol. 2/428.

[264] According to some exegetes, Noah's wife was also on the Ark, while others claim she was not.

The Qur'ān says, *"We gave Moses the Book, and made it a guide to the Children of Israel, (commanding): "Take not other than Me as Disposer of (your) affairs." O you that are sprung from those whom We carried with Noah! Verily he was a devotee most grateful"* (Q 17:3-4). The preeminent Qur'ānic exegete, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 932), said,

> When He said "progeny", He meant all of those He, owner of majestic praise, presents this Qur'ān as proof against him from all the groups of nations, the Arabs and the non-Arabs of them, from the Children of Israel and others. That is because all of those on the earth are from the children of Adam. So, they are from the progeny of those who God carried with Noah on the Ark.[265]

Consequently, it is fair to conclude that all of us living on the earth are progeny of the people spared from God's wrath during the great flood. It is less likely that every one of us is a descendant of one of Noah's sons.

Then, even if we are not all descended from Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the white-black-yellow skin-color taxonomy appears to be the earliest classification utilized to categorize people in the Islamic tradition. This appears to be an accurate account, while the "red-black" binary (or "white-black" in light of Arabs using "red" to mean "white") color taxonomy suggested by the Prophetic tradition ("I was sent to the red and the black...") and embraced by Al-Jāḥiẓ can be seen as the broadest color classification found in Islamic sources. As was the case among the Greeks and for most of European history, these classifications appear to have been utilized as merely convenient categories, not to imply any form of dispositional determinism as has become commonplace today. Of course, the negative reference to Turks in one non-canonical report as people lacking goodness and other extremely disparaging reports about Blacks does pose a major challenge to this claim. That notwithstanding, it does appear to be safe to say that while Muslim scholars generally accepted this tertiary classification of phenotypic difference, the appropriation of the famed "curse of Ham" which designated Africans to presumptive and permanent slave status was only adopted by the least scrupulous among them.[266]

---

[265] Muhammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī min Kitābihi min Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl Āyi al-Qurʾān*, Maʿruf and Hirstani ed., Beirut: Muʾassassah al-Risālah, 1994, vol. 5/9.

[266] Al-Mas'ūdī, who has remarks about Blacks which today would be viewed

Racism in the Modern World

The election of the first African American president provoked some to allege America to be a post-racial society. Several discriminatory events, however, have belied that claim, proving that many Americans still have not cast off the shackles of racism. Muslim immigrants to the United States have often neglected to consider the critically important perceptions of race prevailing amongst the original constitutive members of the country ("Whites" and "Blacks"). The fact that race is no longer an important criterion for American citizenship does not mean that the psycho-emotional vestiges of the 1790 Naturalization Act—which stipulated that only "free whites" could legally become citizens, and the subsequent 1924 Racial Integrity Act, which redefined "whiteness" and outlawed cohabitation with non-whites—have vanished.

Considering his ascendancy to the White House, Donald Trump's early demonization of Muslims pushed much of the American Muslim population into the arms of the political left. Since that time, significant numbers have embraced the assumptions of critical race theory (CRT) and the claims of authors like Robin D'Angelo about White society. Those assumptions impute a biologically and socially deterministic nature to so-called "white supremacist" society. The definition of racism is adjusted to indicate that it can move in only one direction, from the top towards the bottom. Whites are presumed to have all power in society. So, only Whites can be racists. A non-White's race-based attack or insult of a White person can never be classified as racism since non-Whites have no power, only Whites do. Accordingly, Whites are presumptively racist, are born with "white privilege," and can only redeem themselves by acknowledging their privilege and conceding authority to non-Whites. This has occurred even though Islam has the reputation of emphasizing judging others "...by the content of their character, not by the color of their skin."

Though our concern is racism, this phenomenon cannot be effectively combated without a discussion of the concept of race. This is precisely because race is central to any claim of racism. Though linguists differ over when precisely and whence the word 'race' entered the English language, what is clear is that for much of its early history, it was utilized as nothing more than a merely convenient way of speaking of biophysical difference between people. Taxonomies which underscored difference in skin pigmentation, nose shape, lip size, and hair texture were never truly meant

---

as blatantly racist, also appears to accept the validity of reports about the curse of Ham. Scholars, like Ibn al-Jawzī and Ibn Khaldun, however, vehemently reject this narrative as apocryphal. See Ali b. al- Ḥusayn b. Ali al-Mas'ūdī. *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma'ādin al-Jawhar*, 'Abd Al-Hamid ed., Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1973, vol. 1/45.

to imply permanent, primordial, or degenerative physiological types until the 18th century Swedish botanist, Carl Linnaeus (d. 1778). According to the British-American anthropologist, Ashley Montagu (d. 1999),

> The development of the idea of race may clearly be traced from scholastic naturalization of Aristotle's doctrine of the Predicables of Genus, Species, Difference, Property and Accident. From thence it may be directly traced to the early days of the Age of Enlightenment when Linneaus, in 1735, took over the concepts of Class, Species and Genus from the theologians to serve him as systematic tools. The term race was actually first introduced into the literature of Natural History by Buffon who, in the year 1749, used it to describe six groups of man. The term merely represented an extension of the Aristotelian conception of Species, that is to say, it was a subdivision of a species. Buffon recognized that all human beings belonged to a single species, as did Linneaus, and he considered it merely "convenient", and I emphasize the word convenient, as did Blumenbach after him, to distinguish between certain geographic groups of man. Thus, at the very outset the term was understood to be purely arbitrary and a simple convenience.[267]

Throughout human history, societies have adopted criteria for corporate ethnic identification. The racialization of a given population can occur on the basis of shared language and culture, while race in other populations is strongly attached to skin color and phenotype.[268] Pre-enlightenment and old world cultures have largely adopted language-based racialism, while colorism (color-based racialism) became an extremely important basis for racial distinction after the middle ages, in the new world, and most importantly, in present-day America. The idea that shared language is crucial to racial construction is further emphasized in Islamic history by the very fact that it was used as the basis for the Arabization of non-Arabian peoples. Non-Arabians seeking inclusion into Arabness merely needed to appropriate Arab language and culture. As a matter of fact, this criteria for Arabness is clearly articulated in a non-canonical but popular tradition which purports that the Prophet Muhammad said, "Whoever speaks Arabic is an Arab."[269] Consequently, the Levantine Arabs, Iraqis, and those of

---

[267] Ashley Montagu. *The Concept of Race in the Light of Genetics*, London: The Free Press of Glencoe Collier-Macmillan, 1964, p. 2.

[268] Bernard Lewis. *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 17.

[269] This tradition is compiled by the 12th century scholar Ibn 'Asākir (d. 1175)

North Africa were eventually incorporated into Arabness. To quote Audrey Smedley, about color-based conceptions of the word 'race,' she says,

> It was intricately linked with certain presuppositions of thought held by European colonists from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. During that period the word was transformed in the English language from a mere classificatory term [of biophysical variation] into a folk idea. This idea expressed certain attitudes toward human differences as well as prejudgments about the nature and social value of these differences.[270]

In other words, Linnaeus' innovation—beyond his quadripartite division of human populations into white, yellow, red, and black—was that he assigned particular behavioral and temperamental characteristics to each color based upon the four humors. The best of those characteristics was assigned to those with "white" skin (white supremacy) and the worse were associated with those with "black" skin (black inferiority). This was followed in the 19th century by the Aryan master race theory of the French aristocrat, Arthur De Gobineau[271] along with the evolutionism of Charles Darwin who,

---

as well as by the 16th century traditionist Ali Al-Muttaqī Al-Hindī (d. 1567). The 20th century Salafist traditionist Nāsir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999) grades this report as "Very weak." See Muhammad Nāsir al-Dīn al-Albānī. *Silsilah al-Ahadīth al-Da'īfah wa al-Mawdū'ah wa Atharuhā al-Sayyi' fī al-Ummah*, Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma'ārif, 1992, vol. 3/325, citation #925.

[270] Audrey Smedley. *Race in North America: Origen and Evolution of a World View*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1993, pp. 6-7.

[271] Gobineau says in the dedication of his *The Inequality of Human Races*,

> ...I was gradually penetrated by the conviction that the racial question overshadows all other problems of history, that it holds the key to them all, and that the inequality of the races from whose fusion a people is formed is enough to explain the whole course of its destiny...Thus, take an example, a new era of power was opened for Great Britain by the Anglo-Saxon invasion, thanks to the decree of Providence, which by sending to this island some of the peoples governed by the sword of your Majesty's illustrious ancestors, was to bring two branches of the same nation under the scepter of a single house—a house that can trace its glorious title to the dim sources of the heroic nation itself. Recognizing that both strong and weak races exist, I preferred to examine the former, to analyse their qualities, and especially to follow them back to their origins. By this method I convinced myself at last that everything great, noble, and fruitful in the works of man on this earth, in science, art, and civilization, derives from a single starting-point, is this development of a single germ and the result of a single thought; it belongs to one family alone, the different branches of which have reigned in

likewise, entertained deeply racist ideas about non-Whites, especially about the "Negro."[272] What is important to understand from this is that Muslim Americans, no matter how removed we may appear to be from America's colonial past, must still navigate the politics of race in American society but in a healthy way. The overtly racist policies of Jim Crow segregation, miscegenation, political disenfranchisement, and economic suppression may no longer be clearly visible. The psychological vestiges of earlier centuries, however, still pervade in American society and play a major role in many key decisions that affect the lives of ethnic minorities. This is because, as Matthew Frye Jacobson said, "…race is not just a conception; it is also a perception."[273] Similarly, he says, "Because racial classifications so successfully masquerade as features of the natural landscape, they are seldom commented upon overtly."[274] Once I'm convinced of my superior or inferior status and teach my offspring those lessons implicitly or explicitly, there is no longer a need to continue to publicly promote the idea. This is because the post-colonial mindset relieves the colonialist from the need to "physically" subjugate and control a given population. The colonial subject in this case self-regulates his/her own inferior status. This has much to do with the way "white supremacy" is imbibed at one extreme and black inferiority at the other. That is, Blacks will continue to explain every failure or missed opportunity as resulting from "systemic racism" or "white supremacy" even if no doors have been closed in front of them or if one has simply made poor life decisions. And the non-Black may continue to coddle Blacks due to the presumption of Black inferiority and the notion

---

all the civilized countries of the universe." Arthur Gobineau. *The Inequality of Human Races*, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1915, xiv-xv.

[272] Darwin says in his *Descent of Man*,

> At some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilized races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace throughout the world the savage races. At the same time the anthropomorphos apes… will no doubt be exterminated. The break will then be rendered wider, for it will intervene between man in a more civilized state, as we may hope, than the Caucasian, and some ape as low as a baboon, instead of as at present between the Negro or Australian and the gorilla." Charles Darwin. *Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1872, vol. 1/193.

[273] Matthew Frye Jacobson. *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 9.

[274] Matthew Frye Jacobson. *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 52.

that they require special treatment to get ahead. And considering the rise of anti-whiteism in the West, one must be careful to avoid new extremes which create greater division rather than actions which help heal society and offset social imbalances. Prejudgment and directing angst against non-offenders for harms done to one's ancestors should be viewed as toxic to social harmony, as underscored by Islam and other moral systems.

Regardless of racial perceptions, antipathy for black skin is a historically universal phenomenon. Even Black Americans themselves have special derisive names for their darker-skinned brethren. Besides the obvious disparities in political, economic, military, and cultural capital between Whites and others, white supremacy and black antipathy find expression socially through the sale of skin whitening creams. In India where whitening creams are used by both women and men, it has become an industry whose sales are in excess of 300 million dollars per year, vastly outpacing sales of Coca Cola.[275] Even in African countries, like Nigeria, according to the World Health Organization, up to 77% of Nigerian women utilize skin whitening creams.[276] Color discrimination and anti-black racism have a long history on the planet as already stated. David M. Goldenberg, says after speaking about race,

> "Color meant something." Indeed, it meant a great deal. And it conveyed the same negative associations in many different cultures. The same black-white color symbolism seen in Western traditions is found in China and South Asia. It has been found among the Chiang (a Sino-Tibetan people), the Mongour (a Mongolian people), the Chuckchees of Siberia, and the Creek Indians of North America. It is in Sanskrit, Caledonian, and Japanese, as well as Western, literature. Indeed, according to many anthropology reports, the phenomenon is common even in black Africa. It appears that the symbolism of black-negative and white-positive is wide-spread among peoples of all colors.[277]

---

[275] Steve Garner. *Racisms: An Introduction*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2010, p. 79.

[276] ""Preventing Disease Through Healthy Environments: Mercury in Skin Lightening Products"." World Health Organization. Accessed June 15, 2016. http://www.who.int/ipcs/assessment/public_health/mercury_flyer.pdf; See also Adow, Mohammed. "Nigeria's Dangerous Skin Whitening Obsession." - Al Jazeera English. April 2013. Accessed August 30, 2016. http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/04/20134514845907984.html.

[277] David M. Goldenberg. *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 3.

Because black-negative and white-positive symbolism exists in different cultures does not in itself translate into racist ideology. It, however, is important to see how that symbolism can and has had a significant effect on how we perceive of ourselves and others today; how critical analysis of that symbolism is necessary to overcome emotional and moral discordance we would experience from discriminatory social policies developed to lock certain kinds of people out of social privilege as did happen in the Muslim tradition among others.

As can be gleaned from what has proceeded, race is a very volatile and elusive topic. One's definition of race largely depends on the time, place, and societal conditions under which he/she lives. By the close of the first quarter of the 19th century in Colonial Mexico (1519-1821), there were up to 16 different official categories of race. What it means to be "Black" in the United States is different from the meaning of "Black" in Latin America. There are some 14 race taxonomies suggested by various anthropologists. The number of "races" are numbered as low as 1 and as high as 63.[278] That notwithstanding, the most acknowledged color/race taxonomy in use presently is the 5-race division adapted from the 18th century German anthropologist, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach.

Blumenbach divided the races into white, black, brown, red, and yellow or respectively into Caucasian, Ethiopian, Malayan, Amerindian, and Mongolian. Blumenbach's quinquepartite division overthrew Linnaeus' quadripartite division which excluded the Malayan or Brown race. Less influential than theorists like, Linnaeus and Gobineau, Blumenbach's concrete contributions to the study of race were two: 1) his addition of the Brown (Malayan) race to Linnaeus' 4 categories; and 2) his invention of the term, 'Caucasian,' to refer to the inhabitants of Europe, Eastern Asia, and North Africa.[279]

---

[278] Darwin says in *The Descent of Man*,

> But the most weighty of all the arguments against treating the races of man as distinct species, is that they graduate into each other, independently in many cases, as far as we can judge, of their having intercrossed. Man has been studied more carefully than any other animal, and yet there is the greatest possible diversity amongst capable judges whether he should be classed as a single species or race, or as two (Virey), as three (Jacquinot), as four (Kant), five (Blumenbach), six (Buffon), seven (Hunter), eight (Agassiz), eleven (Pickering), fifteen (Bory de St-Vincent), sixteen (Desmoulins), twenty-two (Morton), sixty (Crawfurd), or as sixty-three, according to Burke. This diversity of judgment does not prove that the races ought not to be ranked as species, but it shews that they graduate into each other, and that it is hardly possible to discover clear distinctive characters between them. (Charles Darwin. *Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1871, vol. 7/218).

These facts are crucial, especially since these ideas helped to shape notions of "Americanness" during the first century of the country's birth. It is true that the founding fathers did not choose religion as the most important prerequisite for citizenship. And even though race eventually became less important of a factor, the very fact that it was from the start and for most of America's first two centuries corroborates the suspicion that race and/or color more precisely continues to play a more critical role in Islamophobic bigotry than religion does. Modernity, after all, was in its own way a celebration of the victory of secularism over the authoritarianism of the theologians and the divine right of kings. But, it was also a celebration of Protestantism—the only true "secular" religion[280]—over Catholicism and other non-secular faith traditions. It is no wonder, then, that WASPs (white Anglo-Saxon Protestants) have been at the helm of the political and economic leadership of the country for most of its history. "Whiteness" as a major factor in citizenship did undoubtedly open the door to Europeans of both Protestant and Catholic persuasions to become naturalized. However, between the years 1840-1924, the racial and ethnic differences between the two groups became extremely pronounced, and the magnification of those differences led to wide persecution of non-Protestants until the various kinds of "White" were consolidated between the 1920's and 1960's. According to Matthew Frye Jacobson,

> The period from the 1920s to the 1960s saw a dramatic decline in the perceived differences among these white Others. Immigration restriction, along with internal black migrations, altered the nation's racial alchemy and redrew the dominant racial configuration along the strict, binary line of white and black, creating Caucasians where before had been so many Celts, Hebrews, Teutons, Mediterraneans, and Slavs.[281]

---

[279] Thomas Bendyshe. *Anthropological Treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach*, London: Anthropological Society, 1865, pp. 264-276.

[280] Karen Armstrong argues that Protestant Christianity is the only truly secular religion. Armstrong, Karen. "The Myth of Religious Violence | Karen Armstrong." The Guardian. 2014. Accessed August 30, 2016. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/25/-sp-karen-armstrong-religious-violence-myth-secular.

[281] Matthew Frye Jacobson. *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 14.

Carl Linnaeus may have appropriated the Aristotelian predicables as a way of developing his systematic theory of human classification, but that is no categorical indictment of the practice of rational abstraction and definition. That is because the harmful byproduct of Linnaeus' taxonomy was not the direct consequence of his utilization of Aristotelian categories. It was, actually, in light of his association of certain putatively innate behavioral, temperamental, and physical characteristics with each subspecies of color or "race." Injustice can, undoubtedly, occur on the level of definition. It does, however, occur more on the level of association.

The Qur'ān directs its readers to reflect upon humanity's salient trait: the capacity to share thought and meaning with others. In Surah 55, it reads *"It is the Lord of Mercy, who taught the Qur'ān. He created man and taught him to communicate"* Q 55:1-4. The Qur'ān suggests that Adam was given favor over the angels due to his knowledge of names and ability to designate. The Qur'ān says, *"He taught Adam all the names [of things]"* Q 2:31. It is precisely this capacity for definition and classification which makes man fit to undertake the role of stewardship. Classification allows for man to know what he/she must manage and keep in order. But it also furnishes man with the ability to place value judgments on things which at times may be misapplied. Racism is the ultimate example of human misevaluation of others, especially when those misevaluations lead to prejudicial mistreatment rooted in superficial non-substantive standards, like pigmentation.

The 18th century was significant, not only because it was the century of America's initial formation. It was an age of revolution in both North America and France, which gave us our ideas about liberty and equality; an age of industrial revolution which provided us with our ideas about class; and it was an age of reason and enlightenment which gave birth to many theories and pseudoscientific discoveries good and bad, like the scientific racism of people like, Linnaeus, Gobineau, and Darwin, and even the eugenics movement which had catastrophic effects during the Jewish holocaust.

Former African slaves were given citizenship in 1870, almost a century after the founding of the country. And the "Americanness" of many "white" races, like the Irish, Italians, and Jews, was questioned by members of the ruling Anglo-Saxon culture until "whiteness" was well consolidated in the mind of most European immigrants to America during the 1960's according to Matthew Frye Jacobson. Not long after this in 1965, the floodgates to greater immigration from Muslim lands was opened by the passage of the new Naturalization Act. The country had still not yet begun its national healing from this most violent period during the 60's yet, but thousands of

Muslims started to pour into the country in search of a better life. While most of the public institutions which kept whites and Blacks divided in American life had been dissolved, Muslims new to the American context would now need to be careful not to misread the terrain.

CHAPTER 7

Master Racism in Judeo-Christian and Islamic Contexts

Humans possess an innate impulse to create words and categorize matter. It is also natural for people at times to evaluate matter qualitatively in hierarchal fashion. Oftentimes throughout our history, we have misevaluated difference and apparent dissimilarity with catastrophic results, manifested in the antipathy towards, enslavement, oppression, and denigration of the "Negro."

Islam has the reputation for being an anti-racist faith that allows no room for claims of natural superiority of one group of people over another, neither for White over Black nor Arab over non-Arab. That notwithstanding, at different times in human history many groups have claimed a special place in God's eyes. Claims of race supremacy are met with outrage and dismissal nowadays, especially considering Nazism and the Jewish holocaust. Nevertheless, the Jewish claim of being God's "Chosen People," the Aryan "Master Race" doctrine adopted by the Anglo-Saxon elite, like the French aristocrat, Arthur De Gobineau, or even the assertions of certain pan-Africanists about the inherent goodness and superiority of the "black man" remind us of just how normative such attitudes can be at times. In the Islamic tradition, we likewise witness the development and promulgation of a doctrine of Arab superiority.

Most Muslims today would scoff at such a notion dismissing it by citing the Quranic verse, *"Verily, the most noble of you with God is he who is most God-conscious"* (Q 49:13) or the prophetic tradition that "There is no superiority of an Arab over non-Arab nor white over black except through God-consciousness."[282] One can reconcile these citations, however, as nothing more than the reinforcement of "spiritual" rather than "sociocultural" hierarchy. In other words, God considers the most pious people to be the best of them. However, there are no objective criteria in this world to know just how deep a person's piety truly is. We can only judge by appearances. The Qur'ān says, *"Therefore hold not yourselves purified. He knows best who it is that guards against evil"* (Q 53:33). Prophet Muhammad similarly said, "God-consciousness is here", pointing to his chest thrice.[283]

---

[282] Muhammad Nāsir al-Dīn al-Albānī. *Ghāyah al-Murām Takhrīj Ahādīth*

This, however, does not mean that normative Islam does not or has not favored a certain degree of social privilege based upon pedigree and ethnicity. Rather, Sunnis and Shiites alike have historically elevated the social status of the prophetic household (*ahl al-bayt*) and their descendants. Majority Shiites went even further endorsing a superior spiritual status for certain male progeny of Fatimah—Prophet Muhammad's daughter—born to his cousin, Ali, to whom they refer as "Imams." Muslims summon God's salutations upon the "family of Muhammad" (Āli Muhammad) at least nine times every day during the performance of the canonical prayers. Sunni aggrandizement also extended sociopolitical privilege to the members of the Quraysh tribe, not exclusively to the descendants of the Prophet.

The Arabic word for 'superiority' is *faḍl*. According to the famed ethicist and linguist, Rāghib Al-Asfahānī (d. 1108), *faḍl* has three basic manifestations: 1) with respect to genus (*jins*), like the superiority of animal life over plant life; 2) with respect to species (*naw'*), like the superiority of humans over non-humans; and 3) with respect to innate and accidental individuality or difference (*dhāt*). The innate form is like the advantage of male physical strength over that of females. The accidental difference is like the advantage of rich people over those who are poor. *Faḍl* is a surplus, merit, or advantage that one person or thing possesses over another.

The Qur'ān says, *"Pursue not that by which God has given advantage (faḍl) to some of you over others. Men have a portion from what they earn, and woman have a portion from what they earn. Appeal to God from his bounty (faḍl)"* (Q 4:33). At first blush, the last injunction of the verse would seem to nullify the first, since it would be contradictory for one to be told not to pursue a certain type of *faḍl* and then encouraged to ask God for that same *faḍl* from which one is forbidden. However, when considering Al-Asfahānī's "*faḍl*-types", one can see that the first is not the same as the last. Rather, the first *faḍl* refers to innately infused and divinely determined merits, while the latter refers to accidental individualized merits. So, one

---

al-Ḥalāl wa al-Ḥarām, Damascus, Beirut: Al-Maktab Al-Islāmī, 1980, p. 188 citation #308.

[283] Yahyā b. Sharaf al-Nawwawī. *Sharh Ṣaḥiḥ Muslim*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995, vol. 8/2/103, hadith #2564.

may not seek to become other than what God has created him/her to be (man to woman, woman to man, or black to white), but is allowed to pursue changes to one's given circumstances (from poor to rich, ignorant to learned). In terms of 'black' and 'white', any inherent *faḍl* claimed to either color would be an aesthetic judgment subjectively determined by the sociocultural perquisites assigned to each color in each society.

Perhaps, the most perplexing aspect of the concept of *faḍl* is that Islamic law seems to support the idea that there is a natural superiority found in social hierarchy rooted in biological difference. This manifests itself in the realm of politics and governance more than other areas. Only men, according to mainstream teachings among Sunnis and Shiites, are fit to be head of state (*khalīfah*). Most schools have historically barred women from acting as judges in all areas of legal import. Only men may lead mixed gendered congregations, just as the Friday sermon may only be delivered by men.[284]

On the other hand, maleness should not be seen as the single determinant for occupying these important sociopolitical functions. For not every man is given the opportunity or agency to hold the office of supreme governor, judge, sermonizer, or prayer leader. Rather, only men who fulfill the objective academic, experiential, and moral criteria for each function may occupy such offices. The list of qualified men is, then, further truncated when we consider the fact that, at least, for the office of caliph, Sunnis specified that the person be a member of the tribe of Quraysh, and Twelver Shiites stipulated that he be a member of Ahl al-Bayt or one of the male descendants of 'Ali and Fatimah. Nevertheless, honesty demands that it be acknowledged that even if a woman possesses all of the aforesaid credentials, her femininity will still disqualify her from taking on these roles according to mainstream Islamic teachings.

This legal hairsplitting over temporal leadership qualifications ultimately affected the psyches of the Muslim collectivity in two ways: One, it reinforced the already normative assumption that there is something innate in men that makes them more fit to govern than women are. Secondly, it led to the belief of many that Arabs, generally, and the Quraysh specifically, are culturally superior to other people.

---

[284] The philosopher and comparative law scholar, Ibn Rushd (Averroes), had the following to say about women-led communal prayers,

> They (scholars) have differed about prayer being led by a woman. The supermajority adopts the view that it is not permitted for her to lead men. They differ about her leading women. Al-Shāfiʿī permitted that. Malik forbade it. Abū Thawr and Al-Ṭabarī, however, dissented allowing for her to lead unconditionally. (Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Rushd. *Bidāyah al-Mujtahid wa Nihāyah al-Muqtaṣid*. Cairo: Maktabah Ibn Taymiyyah, 1994, vol. 1/305).

These beliefs materialize in explicit fashion from several scholars who declare it to be a point of orthodoxy to "believe" that "Arabs are superior to non-Arabs." Those scholars include Ibn Qutaybah (d. 899),[285] Al-ʿIrāqī (d. 1403),[286] Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d. 1566), Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328),[287] and Marʿī al-Karamī (d. 1623).[288] After declaring the superiority of Arabs over non-Arabs, Al-Karamī says,

> Once this is established, know that the Arab species (*jins*) is superior to the non-Arab species in the same way the male species is superior to the female species. As for individual persons, sometimes there are women who are better than thousands of men, like Maryam, Fatimah, and ʿĀishah. And sometimes there are non-Arabs who are better than thousands of Arabs, like Ṣuhayb the Greek, Salmān the Persian, Bilal the Abyssinian, and others. For each of them is better than thousands of Arabs. Nay! They are better than thousands of the Quraysh, Banū al-ʿAbbās, and the nobles.[289]

When Persian converts under Arab conquests refused to acquiesce to this doctrine and begun disparaging Arabs while extolling their own virtues, they were branded with the title of "Shuʿūbiyyah." The Qur'ān speaks of God dividing people into "*shuʿūb*" (peoples) and "*qabā'il*" (tribes). According to several exegetes, the former is a reference to non-Arabs, while the latter applies specifically to Arabs. This interpretation, clearly, gives a distinct place to Arabs in that all non-Arabs in all of their ethnic diversity assemble under a single class but not so the Arabs. In this sense, the distinction between Arab and non-Arab becomes akin to the distinction between Jew and gentile. Accordingly, any person who did not believe the Arabs to be superior to them would receive the heretical appellation "*Shu'ūbī*."

---

[285] ʿAbd Allah b. Muslim b. Qutaybah authored a work concerning the merits of the Arabs entitled *Faḍl al-ʿArab wa al-Tanbīh ʿalā ʿUlūmihā* or *The Superiority of the Arabs and Alerting Others to their Special Knowledge*, Jordan: Cultural Foundation Publications, 1998.

[286] The Kurdish scholar Ḥāfiz Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿIrāqī composed a treatise entitled *Risālah fī Faḍl al-ʿArab* or *A Treatise Concerning the Superiority of Arabs*, Damascus: Matbaʿah al-Taraqqī, 1905.

[287] Ibn Taymiyyah has, perhaps, the most to say about the merits of the Arabs in his *Iqtiḍā' al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm bi Mukhālafah Aṣḥāb al-Jaḥīm* or *The Demands of the Straight Path By Opposing the Companions of Hell*, Riyadh: Maktabah al-Rushd, no date.

[288] The Damascene Hanbali scholar Yūsuf b. Marʿī al-Karamī wrote in celebration of Arab virtues *Masbūk al-Dhahab fī Faḍl al-ʿArab wa Sharaf al-ʿIlm ʿalā al-Nasab* or *Molded Gold Concerning the Superiority of Arabs and the Nobility of Knowledge Over Lineage*, Amman: Dar ʿAmmar, 1988.

[289] Yūsuf b. Marʿī al-Karamī. *Masbūk al-Dhahab fī Faḍl al-ʿArab wa Sharaf al-ʿIlm ʿalā al-Nasab*, Amman: Dar ʿAmmar, 1988, p. 21.

In would not be long after the rise of Shuubism, whose proponents referred to their movement as "*harakah al-taswiyyah*" or "movement of social equality (with Arabs)", that Arab and Arabist scholars would react reinforcing the belief in Arab sociocultural and political superiority. The famed lexicographer Al-Fayrūzabādī (817/1414) while defining the Shu'ūbīs says, "The *shu'ūbī*...is one who belittles the affair of the Arabs." The Mālikī exegete Al-Qurṭubī (671/1273) speaks of them as "a faction that does not acknowledge virtue for Arabs over non-Arabs"[290] The renown Mutazilite exegete Al-Zamakhsharī (538/1143) says in *Asās al-Balāghah*, "They are those who belittle the stature of the Arabs and see no superiority of them over others."[291] He also said in his *Al-Mufaṣṣal*,

> I praise God for making me one of the scholars of the Arabic language; disposing me to anger and chauvinism for the Arabs; distinguishing me to be one of their core supporters; preventing me from being a member of the Shu'ūbī swarm; and protecting me from their view whose only utility is the casting of aspersions with the tongues of cursers and combing with the teeth of antagonists.[292]

Interestingly, like Al-Zamakhsharī, several early Persian scholars shared the perspective of Arab favor and sociocultural superiority. They included Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (277/890), Ibn Fāris (395/1004), and Al-Tha'ālibī (430/1038); each whom declared the Arabic language to be the most superior of all languages. Al-Tha'ālibī said,

> Whoever God has guided to Islam, opened his breast to faith, and is given a good opinion of it, believes that Muhammad is the best of messengers, Islam is the best of dispensations (*milal*), the Arabs are the best of nations, Arabic is the best of languages, and

---

[290] Al-Qurṭubī, Muhammad b. Ahmad. *Al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān wa al-Mubayyin li mā taḍammanahu min al-Sunnah wa Āy al-Furqān*. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 2006, 19/415.

[291] Maḥmūd b. 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī. *Asās al-Balāghah*, Muhammad Basil ed., Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1998, p. 509.

[292] Maḥmūd b. 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī. *Al-Mufaṣṣal fī 'Ilm al-'Arabiyyah*, 'Amman: Dār 'Ammār, 2004, p. 29.

> that acquiring an understanding of it is a matter of faith, since it is the tool of knowledge.[293]

Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī says of human languages,

> The most superior of them are four: Arabic, Hebrew, Syriac, and Persian. But the most superior of these four is the language of the Arabs, since it is the most eloquent, perfect, complete, sweet, and clearest of all languages.[294]

If only Arabs are fit for the highest office of government and their culture is deemed to be superior to that of others, accordingly, there is scarcely any reason not to believe that Arabs represent a master "race" and an unparalleled civilization. But, remember that neither Arabs nor other premodern "races" constituted "biological" races. Rather, they were "cultural" races. And that is a major distinction between the early Arabs and other groups claiming race supremacy. Again, when one considers the fact that races, in general, and Arabness, in particular, were not necessarily viewed in the past as genetically homogenous collectives, it is harder to see a one-to-one correlation between Arab supremacy and the race supremacy claims of those who allege to belong to the Aryan race. Rather, contemporary notions of race distort conceptions of "purity" and "degeneration" in a way that premodern notions did not allow for. Notwithstanding the perennial disdain for the "Negro," incorporation into a given "people" or "race" was less restrictive than during and after the European Enlightenment period.

Sharing in the benefits of "Arabness" has been historically easier for people to do than to share in the "blessed" condition of "Aryanness." That is to say that one did not need to be a "pure" Arab or even have Arab "blood" for incorporation. Aryan blood, however, could be diluted through miscegenation, which led to the biological and consequent civilizational "degeneration" of the master race.

The reason for comparing these two dogmatic mindsets despite essential differences between them is that Enlightenment ideas still have wide influence today. Many have imbibed the notion of homogenous biological races. Consequently, the tendency exists to misapprehend what ancient writers intended when they wrote about Arab superiority or "*faḍl*" and misinterpret "Arabs" to mean an undifferentiated biologically uniform collective.

---

[293] 'Abd Al-Malik b. Muhammad Al-Tha'ālibī. *Fiqh al-Lughah*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1994, p. 25.

[294] Abū Ḥātim Ahmad b. Hamdān al-Rāzī. *Kitāb al-Zīnah fī al-Kalimāt al-Islāmiyyah al-'Arabiyyah*, Hamadani ed., Sana: Markaz al-Dirāsāt wa al-Buḥūth al-Yamanī, 1994, p. 73.

Key in premodern conceptions of race were shared language, religion, and culture. Indeed, the Arabs paid particular attention to their paternal ancestors. That, however, is insufficient basis for concluding that they represented a "pure" race, since it ignores the ethnic origin of Arab mothers, the most important of them being Hager, the Egyptian mother of Prophet Ishmael, whose father, Abraham, was of Mesopotamian origin. The second caliph of Islam is quoted to have said, "Learn one's pedigree, and do not be like the Nabateans of upper Iraq (*al-Sawād*), who when asked about their roots say, "From so-and-so village."[295] According to Ibn Khaldun,

> At the start of Islam, identification with one's homeland became common. One would say, "The army of Qisrīn, the army of Damascus, [or] the army of the capitals (*awāṣim*)." That [custom] was transferred to Andalus. It was not because of Arabs disowning the importance of pedigree. It was, rather, because of them being attached to different homelands after the conquest until they became identified with them. So, it became an additional signifier beyond pedigree by which their governors (*umarā'*) distinguished them.[296]

Ibn Khaldun held that, "Lineage is an illusory matter which has no reality." One reason he felt this way was that,

> Some possessors of pedigree are associated with the people of a particular pedigree due to being tied to them by blood, alliance, patronage, or due to fleeing from his own people because of a crime committed. He, then, claims the pedigree of these and is considered one of them in the fruits of chauvinism, blood requital, sharing the guarantee of blood, among other states.[297]

In other words, the very fact that people could join a "race" for reasons other than blood tie to the point that it is forgotten that they were originally from a different "people" is all the reason one needs for ignoring claims of race purity and genetic homogeneity. Ibn Khaldun says, "The like of this happens often in this era as well as in eras before it."[298]

---

[295] 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. Khaldun. *Muqaddimah*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1993, p. 103.

[296] 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. Khaldun. *Muqaddimah*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1993, p. 103.

[297] 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. Khaldun. *Muqaddimah*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1993, pp. 102-104.

The Pan-Africanist scholar Dr. Molefi Asante says,

> Consider the factors that have contributed to the over-powering submissiveness of Africans and other non-Arabs to the culture and religion of Arabs. First, the language of God is said to be Arabic. Secondly, the pilgrimage must be made to Mecca. Thirdly, to pray effectively, one must turn his or her head toward Mecca. Fourthly, Muhammad is said to be the last and most important prophet. Fifthly, certain Arabizing customs are looked upon as valuable and significant, e.g. change of name to Arab name, Arab clothes, and female subordination, to name a few.[299]

For Asante, such points serve as proof of Arab malevolence toward and manipulation of non-Arabs through the fabrication of a religious mythology for colonial pursuit. In his view, one cannot be expected to seriously entertain the possibility that these ideas were communicated by God to Prophet Muhammad, either partially or fully. Asante's suspicion of the genuineness of "colonizing faiths" like Islam and Christianity aside, one should not categorically dismiss his concerns, since there is truth in the assertion that the proselytizers of different faith traditions, especially political leaders, have appropriated religious teachings for political ends.

Those facts aside, there is no denying that Arabs have a favored place in Islam. God revealed the Qur'ān in the Arabic language, made the final prophet an Arab, and Arabic is Islam's *lingua franca.* However, upon a survey of the Qur'ān one finds no decisive indication of Arab superiority. Perhaps, the only verse intimating at such an advantage is, "*You are the best community brought forth for mankind*" (Q 3:110). According to one tradition, Prophet Muhammad said, "I was sent forth from the best of the generations of Adam's children, generation after generation, until I was from the generation in which I am found."[300]

The above verse has been historically understood to refer to the generality of Muslims, which includes its non-Arab members. In other words, although Arabs constituted the majority of the Ummah (community) when the verse was revealed to the Prophet, there were non-Arab members of the community at the time. Furthermore, to remove the said ambiguity, the verse makes the "best-ness" of the community mentioned in this verse contingent upon its members enjoining what's right, forbidding what's wrong, and believing in God, not merely "believing" in God or "being" an Arab. "Enjoining", "forbidding", and "believing" are all acts, not states. This confirms that the "best-ness" of the community is contingent upon 'acts' instead of mere 'conditions' or 'states.' This reinforces the normative view that the criteria for superiority in the eyes of God is God-consciousness, regardless of what sociopolitical advantages have been tendered to certain types of people.

---

[298] 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. Khaldun. *Muqaddimah*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1993, p. 104.

[299] Molefi Kete Asante. *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change*, Chicago: African American Images, 2003, p. 7.

[300] Muhammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Damascus, Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, p. 877 hadith #3557.

The Qur'ān says, "*The believers are simply brothers.*" (Q 49:11) The fact that the Qur'ān uses the consanguine form "*ikhwah*" for "brothers" in this verse rather than the more general "*ikhwān*" when it says, "*The believers are simply brothers*" (Q 49:11) corroborates the belief that the bonds of faith are stronger than blood ties in Islam. Why use "*ikhwah*" (blood brothers) rather than "*ikhwān*" (brothers in association)[301] if the aim is anything other than to reinforce the integrality of faith in the essential definition of the *Ummah*?

Arabs and Arabist Muslim exegetes have debated the question of which of Abraham's two sons, either Ishmael or Isaac, was chosen by God to be sacrificed? It is as if resolving this debate would determine which of the two groups (Arabs or Jews) is naturally superior. While nowhere does the Qur'ān settle this dispute in decisive fashion, it does provide a strong basis for the understanding that Jews have been favored over other people. In two verses, God directly addresses the Children of Israel saying to them, "*Remember My favor upon you, and that I favored you (faḍḍaltukum) over all beings*" (Q 2:47; 2:123). In another verse, Moses in response to a request to "*Make for us a god as they have gods*" says, "*Shall I desire other than God for you as god when He has favored you (faḍḍalakum) over all beings?*" (Q 7:139-140) In yet another verse, the Qur'ān declares, "*Verily, We gave the Children of Israel the Book, governance, and prophethood; We provided for them from wholesome goods; and We favored (faḍḍalnahum) them over all beings; just as We gave them clear proofs from the [divine] affair.*" (Q 45:16-17)

While each of these verses explicitly states that God has given *faḍl* or 'favor' to the Children of Israel, there are no verses in the Qur'ān stating the same for Arabs or any other people for that matter. Not even the prophetic traditions advanced by Arabist scholars use the word *faḍl* to describe the special status given to Arabs. They use, rather, more ambiguous terms and phrases to underscore the privilege given to Arabs by God. This is not meant to imply that Jews, rather than Arabs, indeed, constitute a master "race." It is simply to highlight that if we were to advocate for the existence of a superior race, there is more basis to conclude that that race would be Jews, rather than Arabs as asserted by Arabist scholars and exegetes.

---

[301] Abu Bakr Al-Razi said, "'Ikhwan' is primarily used with respect to friends while 'ikhwah' is used with respect to birth." Muhammad b. Abī Bakr al-Rāzī. *Mukhtār al- Ṣiḥāḥ*. Beirut: Maktabah Lubnān, 1986, 4.

But even the claim of Jewish natural superiority is challenged in the Qur'ān itself. For the Qur'ān says, *"The Jews and Christians say: "We are God's children and His loved ones." Say: "Then why does He punish you for your sins?" Rather, you are mortals from those He created. He forgives whomever He pleases and punishes whomever He pleases"* (Q 5:18). And in Q 3:72-74, God orders Prophet Muhammad to say in response to Jewish and Christian rejection of his message, *"Say: True guidance is the guidance of God"* and *"Say: All favor (faḍl) is in God's hands: He grants it to whoever He will—He is all embracing, all knowing—and He singles out for His mercy whoever He will. And God is possessor of enormous favor (faḍl)"* (Q 3:73).

In other words, if God gives *faḍl* "to whoever He will", it is gratuitous and coincidental, rather than in response to some inherent quality possessed by the person. This would be equally applicable to Jews and Arabs. And if the Jews can fall from God's grace, would it not also be possible for Arabs to as well? The Qur'ān even says, *"O you who believe! Whoever of you turns his back on his faith, God will bring forth a people whom He will love and they will love him* (Q 5:54). It also says in another verse, *"And if you turn your backs, He will replace you with another people besides you who will not be like you"* (Q 47:38). Additionally, if a particular "race" is naturally or biologically superior to another, wouldn't there be tangible proof corroborating this claim such as political, economic, and/or intellectual superiority throughout the span of human history?

As already stated, the Islamic teachings about superiority in the sight of God are clear: *"Verily, the most noble of you with God is the one who is most God-conscious"* (Q 49:13). The Prophet Muhammad taught that only God-consciousness gave merit to Arab over non-Arab and vice versa. Furthermore, he taught that, "Whoever's work slows him down, his lineage will not speed him up."[302] If this were the case, there would seem to be no way to justify any form of natural superiority of one race of people over another. Those who disagree, however, see no contradiction between the Qur'ānic standard for superiority (God-consciousness) and the view of Arabs being a superior race if one is speaking in general terms. In other words, saying that Arabs are superior (*afḍal*) or nobler (*ashraf*) does not imply to these scholars that every individual Arab is better than every single non-Arab. The idea is simply that Arabs as an undifferentiated sum possess more praiseworthy qualities than do other human collectives; just as it appears that "Arabs", primarily, is a reference to those who lived contemporary to the life and times of the Prophet Muhammad.

---

[302] Abū 'Īsā Muhammad b. 'Īsā Al-Tirmidhī. *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, Damascus: Dār al-Fayḥā', 1999, pp. 661-62, Ḥadīth #3945. Also see Yaḥyā b. Sharaf Al-Al-Nawwawī. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi Sharḥ al-Nawwawi*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995, vol. 9/1/19, Ḥadīth #2699.

Though the results and inherent dangers are similar, this greatly differs from arguments set forth by people like Gobineau, who attaches the superiority of the Aryan and other white races to "purity" of blood. The latter alludes to characteristics intrinsic to the race, while the former alludes to characteristics which are accidental and coincidental, not innate. There is a big difference between suggesting that a person is superior because of certain behavioral and moral virtues he possesses as opposed to claiming that the origin of those virtues or merits is the type of blood that flows in one's veins.

We must acknowledge, though, that since perceptions of what it means to belong to a race have changed today, there is the tendency or danger among the uninformed of apprehending the question of race "superiority" as a question of "biological" rather than "sociopolitical" advantage. If "race" is an unscientific term, there is little reason to fear such an assertion. But, if it is understood as an undeniable biological fact, those who lack knowledge of these subtleties will find ourselves the victims of others' vainglory and civilizational anxieties.

Regarding Arab favor (*faḍl*), most writers emphasize as a prime example of what makes Arabs superior that they possess knowledge of the Arabic language by which they can access the meanings of the Qur'ān. As a matter of fact, a non-canonical prophetic tradition discussed previously advances the notion that "whoever speaks Arabic is therefore an Arab."

This reveals that the people of Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, North Africa, and Iraq are all Arabized peoples, unlike the original Arabs who resided in the Arabian Peninsula. It also reveals that for Arabs, purity of blood has never trumped the possibility of inclusion in the collective imaginary even where misapprehensions of genetic purity and originality prevail. All of this supports my earlier claim that racial coherence is largely negotiated, as was the case regarding the creation of the "White" race in America. In the case of the Arabs, all it apparently required was the adoption of the Arabic language for non-Arabs to gain acceptance within the ethno-cultural imaginary, along with the passage of a substantial period. Such a policy facilitated for the greater number of peoples to be subsumed into Arab nationalistic solidarity; a much more positive policy than what was found in society once Western nationalism began to spread. Arabization, therefore, allowed for the blackest of black, the whitest of white, and all in between to gain membership into the dominant culture simply by the adoption of the Arabic language. So, what is one to say of the claims of Arab innate superiority beyond this?

Even if, indeed, there is no "natural" biological superiority of one race over another, the Islamic teachings still caution us against imagining that the religion aims to create a society built upon "sameness" or "lack of distinction" in all its institutions and functions. On the contrary, Islam favors and endorses the existence of social hierarchies in practical terms. Husbands are the caretakers of their wives and children, and they as well as governors have the right to demand obedience from their wards—all within the bounds of just treatment. The Qur'ān tells us of the grades to which prophets (Q 2:253), the scholarly class (Q 58:11), those who fight in God's way (Q 4:95), saintly people (Q 4:69), and others have been elevated far above those who do not qualify for entry into their classes. It teaches us of the preference or advantages (*tafḍīl*) that God gave to people over animals (Q 17:70), husbands over wives (Q 4:34), the Children of Israel over other peoples (Q 45:16), and God's special selection of Adam, Noah, and the families of Abraham and 'Imrān over all other peoples (Q 3:33). We are also told that Muslims constitute the "best nation brought out for humanity" (Q 3:110), and one that has been made a "justly balanced" or "moderate" nation (Q 2:143).

The risks of suggesting that any particular people possess an innate superiority over others in the current age are many and complex. The most significant of those risks is the politicization of those assumed distinctions that results in the limitation of freedoms, agency, and the mass murder or genocide of the "inferior" races. The eugenics movement at the turn of the 20th century proved to be one of the most disastrous to societal harmony, and its illusory findings in many ways still today can be said to interfere with the advancement of more congenial interdependence. The egalitarian concepts espoused by the pioneers of modernism which culminated in the American and French revolutions neglected the ambitions of significant blocks of people. Though many strides have been made in the suffrage of Blacks, women, and other minorities, the clash between the voices that aspire to create egalitarian communities and those who see nothing inherently unfair about a society stratified according to ranks and position persists. In Islam, there is an attempt to accommodate both the egalitarian ambition and the impulse to preserve social hierarchal ranking. For this reason, discussions that locate certain members of the community in status functions to the exclusion of others can easily be misinterpreted as indicators of the superior value of those occupying those offices compared to those who do not.

From the strict standpoint of the Sharī'ah, sameness is not viewed as a civilizational goal. Rather, the Sharī'ah both tolerates and prescribes hierarchal interdependence. Not even patriarchy is presumed to be an intrinsically demeaning or oppressive arrangement for women. As in other traditions, however, relationships founded upon a particular type of subordination can lead to misapprehensions about the degree of one's value both to the community and to God *vis-à-vis* one's subordinates. Put another way, it is easy to assume that the reason that God has allowed one's ascendancy over others to take place is that one has received God's grace, partiality, and predilection. The custodian who should see his/her position as a responsibility instead views it as a right and advantage. This is when the lines between nature and nurture become obscured to the extent that claims of "natural" or "innate" superiority and merit ensue. For this reason, men historically (including Muslim men) have deemed themselves to be naturally superior to women, not merely in their physical capacities.[303] It is also based on an understanding that men have a natural superior intelligence.[304]

In conclusion, there is no denying that God has granted Arabs a privileged position in Islam. But that privilege, historically, has extended to all other groups who underwent Arabization. Even though the true value of people with God is determined by how tenaciously they adhere to their faith commitments, the Muslim legal tradition saw no contradiction between that and the reinforcement of sociopolitical hierarchy even in a form privileging certain ethnic groups. Human life, after all, has been privileged over non-human life, and the children of Abraham have been favored over others. Historical orthodoxy in Islam has promulgated belief in the general superiority of the pioneer generations, the four caliphs of Islam (called "The Rightly Guided"), the ten elders (or "The Ten Given Tidings of Paradise"), the participants in the first and second major battles known respectively as "Badr" and "Uhud", and those who participated in the two pledges of

---

[303] The Andalusian judge of Seville, Abu Bakr b. al-'Arabī (d. 1147) said, "And the superiority of men over women is no secret to any intelligent person even were it only for the fact that the woman was created from the man. So, he is her origin." Qādī Abū Bakr b. al-'Arabī. *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, Mecca: Maktabah Dār al-Bāzz, 1996, vol. 1/256.

[304] The lexicographer, Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī, says of the Qur'ānic verse "Men are the caretakers of women because of merit God gives to some over others..." (Q 4:34), "It means because of the special inherent virtue that men have been given, like firmness, wealth, status, and physical strength." Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī. *Mufradāt Alfāẓ al-Qur'ān*, Beirut: Al-Maktabah Al-'Asriyyah, 2006, p. 399.

'Aqabah and Ridwān. Incidentally, most of these participants are Arabs from Arabia. To acknowledge "best-ness" of their humanity implies the acknowledgement of the best-ness of Arabs overall. Arabness, however, is insufficient for salvation from eternal damnation in the Hereafter, just as it is insufficient of a quality to guarantee entrance into Paradise. It is a characteristic which means practically nothing to God on the Judgment Day.

CHAPTER 8

Race Taxonomies: Human Uses and Abuses of Classification

God instilled within man the passion to communicate to others his thoughts. Arising from this inspiration was the conscious effort to create and evolve what we now know as language.[305] The ancient Greeks defined the human being as "the rational animal." The Arabic word for "rational"—*nāṭiq*—connotes both the capacity for complex reasoning and articulation. In the search for a synonym, Arabic linguists forsook the word, *'āqil*— a less ambiguous word for "rational"—for the more volatile term, *nāṭiq*. This interesting decision to employ one word rather than the other highlights the inseparable connection between rationality and articulation; for, man is a thinker before he is a speaker. And in order to share one's thoughts, one requires a shared and coherent vocabulary.

The Qur'ān hails the human being as the most honored of God's creatures, favored with vicegerency of the earthly realm. The angels, seeking to understand God's decision to "*...place therein one who will spread corruption and shed blood...,*" were told by God, "*Verily, I know what you know not*" (Q 2:30). Subsequently, the Qur'ān tells us that God "*...taught Adam the names of all things, and then presented them to the angels, saying: "Tell me the names of these if you are correct.""*" (Q 2:31). The angels proved incapable of naming the things placed before them, while Adam is portrayed as effortlessly assigning an appropriate designation to each creature. But why is 'naming' or the capacity to name so significant, especially when it is introduced in connection with the question of why God chose man—a highly corruptible creature—to be His vicegerent? Furthermore, what importance does this have to the debasement of the Negro?

---

[305] This assertion, of course, presumes that language is a human convention rather than a matter of divine import. Scholars have historically differed about this question.

Perhaps, these questions may never be fully answerable. Nevertheless, an important fact to consider is that abstraction i.e. the process of producing super-categorical concepts for subordinate concepts is a crucial part of rationality. Maybe the angels' consideration of the animalistic aspect of man's nature is what led them to question his fitness to manage the earthly realm. God, however, turned their attention toward man's rationalistic aspect. Told from a Qur'ānic lens, it is as if God answered the angels saying, "Yes! Man can be easily corrupted by his carnal appetites. He, however, can master his appetite with the intellective powers I have bestowed upon him." Of course, this is not to suggest that one cannot be misled by one's intellect, but rather that the carnal appetite plays a major role in distorting one's sense of reality.

Again, this ability to create words and categories to classify both matter and non-matter is the human being's greatest boon and the bane of his/her existence both at the same time. For in one sense, if the human being is expected to maintain some semblance of order on this planet, he must first know that over which he has been given sovereignty, and then must consider if there is a hierarchy of value between those things. Is the human being just as important as the tree? Is the bird more important than the bee? Does a pale-skinned person have greater value than the one with dark skin? Answers to questions like these have caused great suffering, especially for the darkest people of the planet, for much of human history. There is no inherent danger in the fact that man does "classify." The historical problem has been that people have "misclassified" and "misjudged" the relative value of others.[306]

Vicegerency is "the" supreme trust of humanity. For this reason, certain exegetes have interpreted the trust (*amānah*) mentioned in Q 33:72 to mean vicegerency (*khilāfah*). The Qur'ān says, "*Indeed, We offered the trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains. But, they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof. But, man undertook it. Indeed, he was unjust and*

---

[306] Interestingly, the human soul suffers irredeemable trauma when one takes a life or oppresses, unless a cogent rationalization is found for one's violence. Those rationalizations may include revenge or the belief that one's victim does not deserve to live. In military conflicts, we see this phenomenon in extreme form. A technique utilized to prime soldiers for war is to demonize the enemy through negative imagery, savage narratives, and the invention of ethnic slurs. It is one thing to murder an Iraqi or Afghani man, woman, or child. But it is something completely different to "kill" a towelhead, a sand-nigger, or a camel jockey. The former, are generally, perceived of as fully human, while the latter are viewed as sub-human or not human at all.

foolish" (Q 33:72).[307] If vicegerency is "the" trust, then the crucial question is, in what way and over what has the human been made a trustee? From a cursory glance at the verse, it becomes apparent that the human being's responsibility is one of stewardship and the regulation of the terrestrial realm.

The human being is the only creature on the planet with the capacity to both destroy all life and to preserve it. Unfortunately, many have abused such great power throughout history. The associations of specific behaviors with skin color have been extremely devastating for many populations, while advantageous for others. At one extreme, there has been black degradation, and at the other is "white" or another species of domination.

The most significant questions of human existence and socialization throughout history have been the questions related to identity: 'Who am I? What am I? Where am I from? How did I get here?' These questions at their core are both theological and biological in nature. They are theological in that they beg answers to the most significant question concerning the origin of the universe, concerning whether a god or gods truly exist. They are also biological questions in that they demand a response to questions like, "what makes me different from or like other creatures," and, more importantly, "other people?"

That there are clear biophysical dissimilarities between *homo sapiens* is an undeniable fact; differences in phenotype, ear, lip and nose size, hair texture, and skin color mark each of us in such a way that one is easily led to perceive of himself as having a closer connection to some, rather, than to others of differing phenotypes. Although the earlier anthropologists were split between monogenists, who believed in unitarian human origins, and polygenists, who believed in multiple ancestral origins, premodern and modern monogenists (including Darwin) have largely attributed human biophysical mutation to factors like climate and diet. Darwin says, "There can, however, be little doubt about many slight changes,—such as size from the amount of food, colour from the nature of the food, thickness of the skin and hair from climate, &c."[308] Although Darwin's monogenetic theory was more radical than that of other Western anthropologists who were largely influenced by biblical hermeneutics which traces the origin of modern people to the time of the great flood, it was his theory of natural selection that won for him his great acclaim and continued influence since the publication of his *The Origin of Species.*

---

[307] Even though the refusal of the heavens, earth, and mountains to undertake the trust spoken about in 33:72 appears to result from "willful" refusal, not "undertaking" the trust in the verse may mean an "unfitness" to undertake the task. "Man undertook it" because he was created with the capacity to take it on.

[308] Charles Darwin. *The Origin of Species*, New York – London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975, p. 29.

Earlier scholars from the Islamic tradition, like Ibn Khaldun, Al-Mas'ūdī, and Avicenna, had already spoke of the influence of climate and diet on human biophysical variation, and the 9th century Iraqi scholar, Al-Jāḥiẓ, is claimed by some to be the first person to articulate an evolutionary theory in *The Book of Animals.*[309]

Regardless of who may have been the true pioneer of evolutionary theory, in the West Darwin is afforded a unique place and authority, and it is his articulation of the evolutionary process which has served as the greatest influence upon Western minds. More important than who gets credit is what is implied about human evolutionary development, since if animals evolve new characteristics due to an effort to survive in different environments, can the same be said of humans who are also a kind of animal?

What is most significant about Darwin's theories is that since the promulgation and acceptance of his radical views on human biological history and development, many significant social and scientific disciplines have all been colored by the concept of evolution in one way or another. This was different from earlier times, especially with respect to the subject of race taxonomy, inasmuch that attempts to classify and explain phenotypic dissimilarity was merely a convenience not intended to produce the effect of cognitive dissonance and social alienation. Rather, those classifications did not function on the presumption of degenerative declines from an imagined archetypal purity or, necessarily, generative steps toward something more advanced.

While the Muslim scholars mentioned above advanced the theory that both climate and diet influenced mutations in human skin color and other phenotypic variations, Ibn Khaldun was very clear that while some genealogists errantly have misapprehended racial conceptions by assuming all "Blacks" to be the offspring of Ham, most northern peoples to be the offspring of Japheth, and those of the Mediterranean the offspring of Shem—all sons of Noah,

---

[309] This is the claim of Dr. Mehmet Bayrakdar in his article entitled, "Al-Jāḥiẓ and the Rise of Biological Evolution." Bayrakdar alleges,

> Darwin and his precursors took up the theory of Al-Jāḥiẓ as the base for the essentiality of their evolutionary theories, and they formulated it in a more scientific way in the context of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries development of science. Maybe the only difference between Al-Jāḥiẓ's theory is theologic and more transcendental in this sense that he accepts that the first cause of evolution in living organisms is God and that the other factors are secondary; while Lamarch, Darwin and others' evolution is more immanent and materialistic. Although the mechanistic explanations of the theories are more or less the same, Darwin and other modern scientists differ from Al-Jāḥiẓ and other Muslim writers in ideological interpretation of the theory." (Mehmet Bayrakdar. "Al-Jāḥiẓ and the Rise of Biological Evolution", *The Islamic Quarterly* 27.3 (Jan 1, 1983): 149).

> It would merely be a statement of fact. It would not imply that the inhabitants of the south are called 'Abyssinians' and 'Negroes' because they are descended from the 'black' Ham. The genealogists were led into this error by their belief that the only reason for differences between nations is in their pedigree (*nasab*).[310]

During the 17th and 18th centuries, we find Carl Linneaus and Johann Blumenbach, two of the most influential figures in contemporary perceptions of race,[311] making similar utterances as their predecessor, Ibn Khaldun. The difference, however, is that with Linnaeus, color and behavioral patterns develop an inseparable association, a notion which has made a lasting impression upon contemporary peoples. Blumenbach, on the other hand, gave us the "Caucasian" and the "brown" (or Malay) races.[312] While Ibn Khaldun's theory of climatic influence on human behavior shares some resemblance to that of Linneaus', the former's notion of "behavior" was less determinate than that offered by the latter, in that for Ibn Khaldun climate is merely viewed as contributing to the relative "industriousness" (*'umrān*) of a given population, while for Linneaus, behavior or "disposition" (in addition to humor and posture) was viewed to be innately connected with skin color, the latter of which was produced by climate and degree of exposure to sunlight.

---

[310] 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. Khaldun. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History, The Classic Islamic History of the World.* Trans. Frantz Rozenthal, edited by Bruce Lawrence, Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005, p. 61.

[311] Arthur De Gobineau, author of the Aryan master race theory, is equally influential to modern conceptions of race.

[312] Unlike popular apprehensions of the "Caucasian" as referring to "White" people today, for Blumenbach, "Caucasians included the people of Europe, Eastern Asia, and North Africa." Of the Caucasian variety, Blumenbach has the following to say, "To this first variety belong the inhabitants of Europe (except the Lapps and the remaining descendants of the Finns) and those of Eastern Asia, as far as the river Obi, the Caspian Sea and the Ganges; and lastly, those of Northern Africa." Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. *The Anthropological Treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach*, "On the Natural Varieties of Mankind", London: The Anthropological Society, 1865, p. 265.

In the West, these theories marked a significant reinforcement of the concept of reified races or at least a reified "Black" who occupied the liminal space between brute and member of the human family. It is precisely because of such beliefs—and especially considering Western civilizational ascendancy—that the abuse of the "race-factor" is assumed to have originated in Europe and/or the American colonies.

It is a narrative against which Muslims, who pride themselves on their affiliation to a "racially neutral" international fraternal order, can accentuate the divine claims of their religion, especially since the image of Christianity has suffered tremendously, since so many "White" Christians in the past have appropriated and justified dehumanizing doctrines like the one regarding race superiority and racism. The obvious implications of Muslim celebration of their religious competitors' lapses are that one is often led to assume that only the West suffers and has suffered historically from a racial—or anti-black—problem, which implies that Muslims have been able to escape it. This is especially because it is common knowledge that the Prophet Muhammad spoke in unequivocal terms about the shared humanity between Africans and others as well as the viciousness of the racist impulse.[313]

This is the normative account. However, when one finds non-canonical traditions like, "The black person steals whenever he's hungry and fornicates whenever he's sated,"[314] pause is given as to just how race neutral the Muslims have remained throughout history, especially since this report is to be found with many different variations in early hadith collections. So, even if classified as weak, apocryphal, or heterodox, evidence exists proving that they influenced certain scholarly perspectives on the black African.

Then, who is the "black" designee in these reports? From what region does he originate? These are extremely important questions, since lexicographers like Ibn Manẓūr and others report that the predominant colors among the Arabs were brown (*sumrah*) and black (*udmah*)—or, rather, light and dark brown. Similarly, the author of one *History of the Sudan* (or Blacks), Na'ūm Shuqayr, lists the Arabs as a subspecies of the "Blacks." If that is so, why would Arabs refer to others as "black"?

---

[313] As this chapter lays out, there are several examples of Prophet Muhammad correcting discriminatory behavior. But the most general direction he is recorded to have offered is in the following speech offered on the day of the Meccan conquest after receiving word of newly converted Meccans belittling Bilal's black skin,

> O people! God has rid you of the false pride of those of the days of pre-Islamic ignorance and its exultation of its fathers! Men are of two types: a pious man who is upright, precious to God, and one who is wicked and wretched, insignificant to God. Men are sons of Adam, and Adam is from dirt.

Abū 'Īsā Muhammad b. 'Īsā Al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, Damascus: Dār al-Fayḥā', Dār al-Salām, 1999, p. 743.

[314] Muhammad b. 'Abd Al-Raḥmān Al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Maqāṣid Al-Ḥasanah*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1979, p. 111.

The answer is that "black" in common usage by Arabs was as a designation for those with well-known indigenous east and sub-Saharan African ancestry, like Bilal b. Rabāḥ,[315] the famous companion of the Prophet Muhammad. The fact that the word had the dual connotation of a neutral color description and a negative metaphorical designation made cognitive disassociation easy for those who considered themselves to be Arabs when the word was used derogatorily. This is somewhat similar to their use of the word "red" to refer to "whites": the people of Persia, Byzantium, and the Levant. As for self-identification, the term "Arab" was sufficient.

Renowned race anthropologists like Ashley Montague have fought long and hard for eliminating the use of the word 'race' from scientific parlance, since cultural events have made its use as an authentic designator of biologically differentiated human populations extremely difficult. Some prefer the use of the term, "genogroup." Some qualify the term with the prefix "geographical" races. But the most common scientific term utilized is "ethnic groups." According to Jean Hiernaux,

> From whatever viewpoint one approaches the question of the applicability of the concept of race to mankind, the modalities of human variability appear so far from those required for a coherent classification that the concept must be considered as of very limited use. In my opinion, to dismember mankind into races as a convenient approximation requires such a distortion of the facts that any usefulness disappears; on the contrary, only the harm done by such practices remains. They tend to force our minds into erroneous channels of thinking, or, if we manage to retain any lucidity, to enter a maze of distinctions and restrictions.[316]

---

[315] Bilal might have been the son of Abyssinian parents, but according to his biographers he was an Arabian, being born and raised on the peninsula.

[316] Jean Hiernaux. "The Concept of Race and the Taxonomy of Mankind", *The Concept of Race*, Ahsley Montague ed., London: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964, p. 43.

Conclusion

We have seen in the foregoing how the basic human impulse to share one's thoughts with others can distort reality to the point of devaluation and dehumanization. Such distortion historically has found its most extreme manifestation in the apprehension of the black sub-Saharan African as subhuman, in some cases, and not human at all, in others. This phenomenon has been universal. And neither Muslims nor the Islamic tradition have been able to escape the fallout from the explosive force of black antipathy.

Normative Islam, like other Abrahamic faiths, teaches that human beings are a single race in that we all originate from a single man and woman. Though we celebrate our unified origin, we have not been discouraged from affirming our differences born out of centuries of phenotypical and cultural mutation. Our different hair textures, lip sizes and shapes, and skin colors mark us in a way that at times it is hard to glean similarity or even to imagine that the claims of monogenetic origin happen to be true. Those salient marks of distinction coupled with centuries of sociopolitical reinforcement of imagined "race" types have challenged our ability to reconstruct and mend bygone affinities reintroduced to us by our respective faith traditions. Premodern race was cultural rather than biological, as it is conceived and perceived of today. It remains, though misunderstood by many in the present, a sociological phenomenon rooted in experience rather than a biological fact.

The natural human desire for distinction and status above and beyond others has countless times erupted and mired us in not only the competition for greater wealth and power. It has also impressed upon our psyches an imperializing inclination to colonize the minds of others, indoctrinating them through ideologies and symbols into the acknowledgment of our natural superiority. Be it an extreme master race doctrine like Aryanism or another less benign like Arab or "Black" supremacy, such doctrines do not do much to improve the condition of the vast majority of the earth's inhabitants. We have seen how definitions are born and transform, how they empower and disentitle, how they privilege and oppress, and how they influence our interpretations and applications of sacred texts.

The Mālikī School and Islam, in general, have been largely successful at projecting themselves as racially nondiscriminatory in spite of the existence of anomalous rules and scriptural sanctions which disparage Blacks for their color and "lack of civilization." We have, however, been able to show that these negative views expressed, both in the form of prophetic advice and theo-juristic reflection, are the direct result of human failings. Regarding the prophetic traditions, the failure occurred in scholars not employing the appropriate amount of scrutiny for determining the spuriousness and weakness of reports which disparage Blacks for being what God created them to be. Theologians and jurists failed in not challenging their very own cultural subjectivity regarding aesthetics and general social experience.

That notwithstanding, one must remember that scholars being the "heirs of the Prophets" still means that they are not "Prophets." Prophets are morally infallible according to the normative Islamic teachings. Scholars and saints, however, are not. Acknowledging that the learned are nothing more than mere "mortals" (men and women alike) should teach us that error in understanding and conduct are within the sphere of possibility.[317] If Prophet Muhammad, as did happen on numerous occasions, could be challenged about his understanding of worldly affairs and political decisions,[318] why would anyone expect a different policy to be adopted toward religious scholars? This realization, I hope, will make it easier for people to appreciate and benefit from the wisdom of the sages and learned, while acknowledging their lapses and, furthermore, avoiding them whenever they are stumbled upon.

The reactions of scholars like Uthmān b. Ḥasan Barrī and Ahmad Al-Shinqīṭī to legal teachings suggesting black cultural and aesthetic inferiority show that there was definite resistance in Africa to black degradation. The same can be said of the efforts of Amadu Bamba and the Almaami Abdul-Qadir Kan to abolish the slave trade. The objections raised by Al-Jāḥiẓ against negative stereotyping of Blacks underscores as well that this problem was quite early in the general Islamic tradition.

This research would benefit greatly from any academic contributions which unearth from indigenous African languages like Hausa, Mandingo, Wolof or even Swahili which reveal a much broader campaign of resistance to Arab and Afro-Arabian devaluation sub-Saharan Africans. The fact that works of many African scholars appear to still exist only in manuscript form also poses a major challenge to facilitating textual research concerning the relationship between "Negro" and non-"Negro" scholars of the continent.

---

[317] Al-Qushayrī acknowledges the fallibility of the saint (*walī*) in his *Risālah*. See his short discussion of it in Al-Qushayri, 'Abd Al-Karīm. *Al-Risālah Al-Qushayriyyah*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2005, p. 381.

[318] The Companions challenged the wisdom of the Prophet on several occasions. At Badr, one of them questioned the wisdom of his war strategy. And 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb regularly challenged his decisions when he believed them to be less than ideal. Unless the Prophet's instructions came directly from God, he tolerated and entertained the views of his Companions without making them feel that it was hazardous to their salvation after death. If the Prophet could be questioned, there is little reason to doubt the appropriateness of questioning the political and worldly wisdom of scholars and spiritual mentors.

APPENDIX I

Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalāni (d. 852/1448) on the Prophet Muhammad's Color

Among the many reports that Muhammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī (d. 256/869) reports concerning the physical description of the Prophet Muhammad is the following:

> (3547) Al-Rabīʿah b. Abī ʿAbd Al-Raḥmān, is reported to have said, "I heard Anas b. Mālik describe the Prophet—God's blessing and peace on him—saying: "He was mid-sized among men—neither tall nor short, bright-faced (*azhar al-lawn*) —neither pasty white nor intensely dark…"[319d]

The fifteenth century hadith master and Shāfiʿī jurisprudent, Ahmad b. ʿAli b. Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, had to following to say while commenting on this report and the many others reported by Al-Bukhārī,

"His saying [of the Prophet that he was] "bright-faced" (*azhar al-lawn*) means [he was] "white imbued with redness" (*abyaḍ mushrab bi ḥumrah*). And that [explanation] has occurred explicitly in the hadith of Anas from another channel found with Muslim, Saʿīd b. Manṣūr, Al-Ṭayālisī, Tirmidhī, and Al- Ḥākim from the hadith of Ali [b. Abī Ṭālib] who said: "The Prophet—God's blessing and peace on him—was white of a sort that was imbued with redness." A similar description is to be found with Ibn Saʿd on the authority of Ali and Jābir [b. ʿAbd Allah] as well as with Al-Bayhaqī from a number of channels on the authority of Ali, and in *Al-Shamā'il* from

---

[319] The version of Al-Tirmidhī from the same narrator, Anas b. Mālik, has already been mentioned wherein the Prophet is described as "brown" (*asmar al-lawn*).

the hadith of Hind b. Abī Hālah [saying] that he was bright-faced (*azhar al-lawn*). As for his saying [that he was] "neither pasty white nor intensely dark", this is how it comes in the major canons (*uṣūl*). It has occurred with Al-Dāwdī, though, in accord with the version of Al-Marwazī [that he was] "pasty, but not white" (*amhaq laysa bi abyad*). Al-Dāwdī objected to it, and [Qāḍī] 'Iyāḍ said that it was a misapprehension (*wahm*), saying: "Similar is the case with the version of those who relate that he was neither white nor intensely dark. It is not correct (*laysa bi ṣawāb*)." Thus, he said. But it is not good [as a response] regarding the latter [version] since it [really] means that he was neither intensely white nor intensely dark. Rather, his whiteness was mixed with redness. And the Arabs would refer to those who looked like this as "light brown" (*asmar*). For this reason, it occurs in the hadith of Anas found with Ahmad, Al-Bazzār, and Ibn Mandah with a sound chain (*ṣaḥīḥ*), the soundness of which Ibn Ḥibbān corroborates that: "The Prophet—God's blessing and peace on him—was light brown (*asmar*)." But Al-Muḥibb Al-Ṭabarī rejected this version saying, "There exists about the hadith of the chapter by way of Mālik from Al-Rabī'ah [that]: "He was neither pasty white nor intensely dark." And reconciliation between the two is possible." Al-Bayhaqī also reported it in *Al-Dalā'il* from another channel from Anas who mentioned the prophetic description saying, "The Messenger of God—God's blessing and peace on him—was white of a sort that inclined toward brownness." And it is found in the hadith of Yazīd al-Ruqāshī from Ibn 'Abbās concerning the description of the Prophet—God's blessing and peace on him— [that he was] "a man between two men, and his complexion (*jism*) was red."[320] And in one wording [it says that he was] "Brown inclining toward white." Ahmad reported it. And its chain is fair (*ḥasan*). So it becomes clear from the sum of the narrations that what is meant by brownness (*sumrah*) is redness (*ḥumrah*) mixed with whiteness (*bayāḍ*), and that the whiteness being confirmed is the sort that is mixed with redness, while the sort negated is the kind which lacks it which is the skin tone that Arabs disliked and referred to it as "pasty" [or "pale"] (*amhaq*). And by this it becomes clear that the version of Al-Marwazī— "[he was] pasty, not white"—is inverted (maqlūbah). But God knows best. This is taken with consideration of the fact that it is possible to direct this to mean that what is meant by "pasty" is "cucumber-colored" (*al-akhdar al-lawn*) whose whiteness does not reach its peak, nor its brownness or redness. It has been conveyed as well that *mahq* [the word for "pale whiteness"] is a reference to the greenish color of water. But this redirection becomes complete under the presumption that the narration is confirmed. The unqualified characterization of him as white has already passed in the hadith of Abū Juḥayfah. Similar is the case in the hadith of Abū al-Ṭufayl from Muslim. And in one version found with Al-Ṭabarānī [he says], "I do not forget the intense whiteness of his face and the intense blackness of his hair." Similar statements are found in the above poem of Abū Ṭālib [wherein he says], "And [he is] white. Rain is requested from the clouds by his face" (*wa abyaḍ yustasqā al-ghamāmu bi wajhihi*). And in the hadith of Surāqah found with Isḥāq [it reads], "Then I started to look at his shin [and it was] as if it was a pith of a palm tree (*jummārah*)." And Ahmad reports from the hadith of Muḥarrish al-Ka'bī regarding the 'Umrah of Al-Ji'rānah that he said, "Then I looked at his back, and it was as if it was an ingot of silver." And it is related that Sa'īd b. al-Musayyab heard Abū Hurayrah describe the Prophet—God's blessing and peace on him—saying, "He was intensely white." Ya'qūb b. Sufyān and Al-Bazzār related it with a strong chain. But the way to reconcile them is in the way that has already passed. Al-Bayhaqī said, "It is said that the parts of him that were imbued with redness or inclining toward brownness were those parts that basked in the sun or were exposed to the wind. As for what was shielded by clothing, it was pearly white (*al-abyaḍ al-azhar*)." I say: And this is what Ibn Abī Khaythamah mentioned after the hadith of 'Āishah regarding his description—God's blessing and peace on him—in a simpler fashion than this adding [that], "And his color about which there is no doubt was pearly white." As for what has occurred in the *Ziyādāt* of 'Abd Allāh b. Ahmad in *Al-Musnad* by way of Ali [that he was] "pervading in intense whiteness" (*abyaḍ mushrab shadīd al-waḍaḥ*), it contradicts the hadith of Anas [stating that he was] "neither pasty..." which is sounder (*asaḥḥu*). And it is possible to reconcile [these reports] by construing what is in the version of Ali according to what [was seen] from under the clothing as opposed to what was exposed to the sun. And Allah knows best."[321]

---

[320] In other words, he was medium height with red skin.

---

[321] Ahmad b. Ali b. Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī. *Fatḥ Al-Bārī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Beirut: Dār al-Manār, 1992, 6/623-624.

APPENDIX II

The Whitening of the Arabs of the 'Abbāsid Caliphate (750-1258 CE)

Adapted from Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's *Tārīkh al-Khulafā'*

Name	Mother	Mother's Race
Al-Saffāh	Rayṭah al-Hārithiyyah	Arab
Al-Manṣūr	Salāmah	Berber
Al-Mahdī, son of Al-Manṣūr	Umm Mūsā b. Manṣūr	Himyarite Arab
Al-Hādī, son of Al-Mahdī	Al-Khayzrān	Berber
Al-Rashīd, son of Al-Mahdī	Al-Khayzrān	Berber
Al-Amīn, son of Al-Rashīd	Zabīdah b. Ja'far	Hashimite Arab
Al-Ma'mūn, son of Al-Rashīd	Marājil	Berber[322]
Al-Mu'taṣim, son of Al-Rashīd	Māridah	Persian[323]
Al-Wāthiq, son of Al-Mu'taṣim	Qarāṭīs	Roman
Al-Mutawakkil, son of Al-Mu'taṣim	Shajā'	[ ][324]
Al-Mustanṣir, son of Al-Mutawakkil	Ḥabashiyyah	Roman
Al-Musta'īn, son of Al-Mu'taṣim	Makhāriq	[ ][325]

---

[322] That the mother of Al-Ma'mūn was a Berber seems to be the most logical conclusion since she was a concubine. The trend of Berber concubines started with Al-Manṣūr. Al-Suyūṭī does not mention the race of Marājil, Al-Ma'mūn's mother.

[323] Al-Suyūṭī does not mention the race of Māridah, the mother of Al-Mu'taṣim, but since she was a Kufan concubine, it seems a logical conclusion that she was of Persian heritage.

[324] Al-Suyūṭī does not mention the race of Al-Mutawakkil's mother. He, rather, suffices to state that she was a concubine.

[325] Al-Suyūṭī does not specify the race of Al-Musta'īn's mother. He suffices to

Al-Mu'tazz, son of Al-Mutawakkil	Qabīḥah	Roman
Al-Muhtadi, son of Al-Wāthiq	Wardah	[ ][326]
Al-Mu'tamid, son of Al-Mutawakkil	Fatyān	Roman
Al-Mu'taḍad, son of Al-Muwaffaq b. Al-Mutawakkil	Ṣawāb, Ḥirz, or Ḍirār	[ ][327]
Al-Muktafī, son of Al-Mu'taḍad	Jījak	Turkish
Al-Muqtadir, son of Al-Mu'taḍad	Gharib or Shaghab	Roman or Turkish
Al-Qāhir, son of Al-Mu'taḍad	Fitnah	[ ][328]
Al-Raḍī, son of Al-Muqtadir	Ẓalūm	Roman
Al-Muttaqī, son of Al-Muqtadir	Khalūb or Zahrah	[ ][329]
Al-Mustakfī, son of Al-Muktafī	Amlaḥ al-Nās	[ ][330]
Al-Muṭī', son of Al-Muqtadir	Shaglah	[ ][331]
Al-Ṭā'i, son of Al-Muṭī'	Ḥazār	[ ][332]
Al-Qādir, son of Isḥāq b. Al-Muqtadir	Tamnā or Dimnah	[ ][333]
Al-Qā'im, son of Al-Qādir	Badr al-Dujā or Qaṭr al-Nadā	Armenian
Al-Muqtadi, son of Muhammad b. Al-Qa'im	Arjuwān	[ ][334]
Al-Mustaẓhir, son of Al-Muqtadī	[ ][335]	
Al-Mustarshid, son of Al-Mustaẓhir	[ ][336]	
Al-Rashid, son of Al-Mustarshid	[ ][337]	

---

say that she was a concubine.

326 Once again, the author simply states that the mother was a concubine (*umm walad*).

327 Al-Mu'taḍad's mother was a concubine. Her race is not mentioned by the author.

328 Her race is undeclared.

329 The author simply states that the mother of Al-Muttaqī was a slave woman (*amah*).

330 The mother's race is not stated. But she was a concubine.

331 Al-Muṭī's mother was a concubine, but her race is not mentioned.

332 No race is mentioned for his mother who was a concubine.

333 No race is mentioned for his mother who was a concubine.

334 His mother was a concubine, but Al-Suyūṭī does not mention her race.

335 Unlike his usual custom, Al-Suyūṭī mentions neither name nor slave status for Al-Mustaẓhir's mother.

336 In this case, Al-Suyūṭī mentions the fact that Al-Mustarshid's mother was a concubine without disclosing her name.

337 As in the case of Al-Mustarshid, Al-Suyūṭī only mentions that Al-Rāshid's

Al-Muqtafī, son of Al-Mustaẓhir	[ ][338]	Ethiopian
Al-Mustanjid, son of Al-Muqtafī	Ṭāwūs	Georgian
Al-Mustaḍī', son of Al-Mustanjid	Ghaddah	Armenian
Al-Nāṣir, son of Al-Mustanjid	Zamurrud	Turkish
Al-Ẓāhir, son of Al-Nāṣir	[ ][339]	
Al-Mustanṣir, son of Al-Nāṣir	[ ][340]	Turkish
Al-Musta'ṣim, son of Al-Mustanṣir	Hājar	[ ][341]
Al-Mustanṣir, son Al-Ẓāhir	[ ][342]	
Al-Ḥākim, tertiary grandson of Al-Mustarshid	[ ][343]	
Al-Mustakfī, son of Al-Ḥākim	[ ][344]	
Al-Wāthiq, son of Al-Mustamsik	[ ][345]	
Al-Ḥākim, son of Al-Mustakfī	[ ][346]	
Al-Mu'taḍad, son of Al-Mustakfī	[ ][347]	
Al-Mutawakkil, son of Al-Mu'taḍad	[ ][348]	
Al-Wāthiq, son of Ibrāhīm b. Al-Mustamsik	[ ][349]	

---

mother was a concubine without disclosing her name.

[338] Al-Suyūṭī does not mention Al-Muqtafī's mother's name.

[339] Al-Suyūṭī mentions neither the name nor the social status of Al-Ẓāhir's mother.

[340] Al-Suyūṭī makes no mention of the name of this bondswoman (*jāriyah*).

[341] Her race is not mentioned.

[342] There is no mention of his mother. Note as well that the reign of this Al-Mustanṣir marks the beginning of the 'Abbāsid rule in Egypt when the seat of the caliphate was relocated from Iraq to Egypt after the Tatar incursions and pillaging into Eurasia toward the second half of the 13th century. Apparently, the Egyptian 'Abbāsids abandoned the custom of those in Iraq to bequeath the right to rule over to the sons of their concubines as can be observed by the fact that Al-Suyūṭī neglects mention of many of the mothers of the caliphs that will be mentioned after Al-Mustanṣir. It is only with Al-Musta'īn and the other sons of Al-Mutawakkil that this trend returns toward the end of the 'Abbāsid caliphate and the rise of the Seljuk Turks.

[343] Al-Suyūṭī neglects mention of his mother and her social status.

[344] There is no mention of his mother.

[345] There is no mention of his mother.

[346] There is no mention of his mother.

[347] There is no mention of his mother.

[348] There is no mention of his mother.

[349] There is no mention of his mother.

APPENDIX III

Mālikī School of Law

The Mālikī School

The Mālikī School is one of four surviving Sunni schools of Islamic law which takes its name from the school's eponym, Mālik b. Anas b. Mālik al-Asbahī (d. 795). Mālik resided in the Arabian city of Medina in the 8th century. He delivered regular lessons in the Prophet's Mosque (Al-Masjid Al-Nabawi) and became acknowledged as "the scholar of Medina" whose arrival was foretold in several sound prophetic traditions. Mālik was respected by the masses and the political elite, and according to tradition at least two of the Abbasid caliphs sought Mālik's approval to impose the teachings of his widely circulated, *Muwatta'*, on the populous. Mālik objecto ed to the request citing the fact that the knowledge spread by the Prophet's companions was so diffuse in the land that it would be too discomforting and impractical to impose one uniform law code on the empire's culturally and ideologically diverse populations.

Mālik was well known for his piety, scrupulousness, and acumen. The most authoritative works on his life mention that he studied with approximately 1000 scholars or at least acquired some knowledge of the prophetic tradition from that number. Over 1000 people are recorded as having narrated hadiths from him as well. Like most of his teachers, Mālik championed the school of Medina as the standard for determining Islamic orthopraxy. Whatever the Medinites approved of, disapproved of, or agreed upon was generally taken to be representative of the prophetic way (Sunna), while knowledge and practices foreign to Medinite society at the time were viewed as heterodoxical. Mālik's deference to the prophetic tradition was so great that it is reported that he would perform a ritual shower prior to sitting to teach the prophetic tradition, perfume himself and the room, and would adorn his best attire.

Mālik was a practical jurist. He, therefore, was not fond of the speculative jurisprudence originating from Iraq. He avoided theological debates as well considering them to be a form of heresy. And he would order those heretics be expelled from his presence whenever they initiated talk of things related to the divine decree and the divine attributes. According to one account, after being challenged by a heretic to a debate, Mālik responded, "As for me, I have certainty about my religion. You seem to have doubt. Go find someone like yourself who equally doubts and argue with him."

Mālik's good repute with the Abbasid caliphs who overthrew their Umam yyad rivals did not come easy. The Islamic sources depict him as working to subvert the legitimacy of the new regime at the outset. A famous account is given about his resistance to Abbasid demands not to relate the prophetic tradition stating that "There is no binding oath taken by one who is coerced"; a tradition which implied that the Abbasid violent overthrow of the Umayyads was illegitimate, and that fealty to the incumbent rulers was still valid unless the people voluntarily casted it off and accepted the rule of the challenger. For this, Mālik was persecuted and tortured by the Abbasid governors. Despite it, later caliphs developed a deep respect for his knowledge and piety, and some were even moved to study with him. This relationship undoubtedly contributed to the preservation of Mālik's intellectual legacy, especially considering that approximately 70 people studied Malik's *Muwatta* with him. They included several governors and their sons.

Upon Malik's demise, his views spread in his hometown of Medina, out east into Iraq, and westward to Egypt and the greater part of north and west Africa. After the north African Moorish conqueror, Tāriq b. Ziyād, begun his conquest of Iberia beginning in the year 711 (the same year of Mālik's birth), the Mālikī school was eventually adopted by the governors of Andalus (Islamic Spain) for the greater part of a reign spanning approximately eight centuries (711-1492). And by the 11th century, Mālikī influence predominated in North and West Africa.

The students of Mālik were numerous and traveled from distant lands to come to learn from him considering his good repute and erudition. As students returned after studying with this great wise man, certain centers became recognized and marked by the spread of Mālikism or Mālikī legal thought. Four sectors of the Mālikī School would eventually arise respectively in Egypt, Medina, Iraq, and Andalus, which included North Africa—collectively referred to as the Maghrib. While united by common teachings, these schools would also be distinguished by disagreements over popular narrations and official views of the school's founder. Overtime, most Mālikis would eventually coalesce around the superiority of the Egyptian-Azharī sector of Mālikism where many of the most influential scholars of interpretative autonomy (ijtihād) would arise.

Major Juridical Figures

When it comes to understanding the uniqueness of the Mālikī School, one must first understand the importance of the city of Medina in Islamic history. Medina was the known as "The Abode of Emigration" since its native inhabitants invited the Prophet Muhammad and his companions (called "Sahabah") to make their exodus from Mecca there in 613 considering years of religious persecution prior to that period. In Medina, most of the laws and mores of Islam were revealed and promulgated amongst the fledgling nation. Being the new permanent home of Islam and its prophet, it was taken for granted that the authentic teachings of Islam originate from Medina. In the Islamic discipline known as hadith science, it was largely accepted by traditionists that the soundest reports were those which originated from Medina. The companions of the Prophet who preserved and transmitted the revealed and living tradition of their master bequeathed that knowledge to their successors (called "Tabi'ūn"). For Medinite society, the most important of those successors were a group of them referred to as "The Seven Jurists" (Al-Fuqahā' Al-Sab'ah). These seven jurists were in most cases the direct descendants of the Meccan nobles who continued to lead the community in religious matters after the Prophet's demise during the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties. In other cases, they were extended relatives of the ruling classes.

Take Sa'id b. al-Musayyab, for example, who is considered by Muslim traditionists to be the most knowledgeable of all the Successors. He was married to the daughter of the companion, Abū Hurayrah, the most prolific conveyor of prophetic traditions. Urwah b. al-Zubayr, another of the distinguished seven jurists, was the son of Asmā', daughter of Abū Bakr al-Siddique, the first caliph in Islamic history. Another from the same family was Al-Qāsim, grandson of Abū Bakr through his son, Muhammad. The fourth jurist was Khārijah, the son of the Prophet's famous and trusted scribe, Zayd b. Thābit. Zayd also oversaw the campaign to gather and standardize the Qur'anic script during the reign of Abū Bakr and that of the 3rd caliph, Uthmān. The fifth jurist was 'Ubayd Allah, the great grandson of the knowledgeable companion, 'Abd Allah b. Mas'ūd. Ubayd Allah's father was 'Abd Allah b. Utbah b. Mas'ūd. Sulaymān b. Yasār was also one of the Seven Jurists. But he was not connected to the elite by blood.

He was, however, a client of the Prophet Muhammad's wife, Maymūnah, a relationship which bestowed upon him the tribal alliance with Banū Hilāl, Maymūnah's clan. As for the last of the seven jurists, the strongest opinion is that it was Sālim, the son of 'Abd Allah b. 'Umar, the great scholar and son of the second caliph, 'Umar b. al-Khattāb. Some, however, list, instead of Sālim, Abū Bakr b. Sulaymān, or Abū Salamah b. 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf. The latter's grandfather was one of the earliest followers of the Prophet Muhammad and one of the elders responsible for selecting the caliph.

The knowledge inherited by the seven jurists and others was later passed on to later generations. And it is believed that Mālik was the one who possessed the greatest breadth and depth of that intellectual legacy. Once his fame spread, scholars from the far corners of the Muslim empire traveled to Medina to learn directly from this great scholar. After learning, they dispersed into the land returning to their home countries and visiting others on a mission to share the great blessing of this much cherished knowledge. In Medina, Malik's knowledge was borne by the likes of Ibn Kinānah, Ibn Mājishūn, Mutarrif, Ibn Nāfi', and Ibn Maslamah. In Egypt, Mālikism was spread by Ibn al-Qāsim, Ashhab, Asbagh, Ibn Wahb, and Ibn 'Abd Al-Hakam. In Iraq, it was promulgated by the likes of Qādī Ismā'īl, Qādī 'Abd al-Wahhāb, Ibn Qassār, Abū Bakr al-Abhurī, and Ibn Jallāb. And in North Africa and Andalusia (Al-Maghrib), the school was identified with luminaries like Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī, Lakhmī, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Sha'bān, Al-Bājī, Ibn al-Qābisī, Ibn 'Abd Al-Barr, and Ibn al-'Arabī.

Major Reference Works

The Mālikī sources can be divided into primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are namely 8 works: 1) The *Muwatta'* of Mālik b. Anas (d. 795); 2) *Al-Mudawwanah Al-Kubrā* of Sahnūn b. Sa'īd al-Tanūkhī (d. 854); 3) *Al-Mukhtalitah* of 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. al-Qāsim (d. 806); 4) *Al-Wadiha* of 'Abd Al-Malik b. Habīb (d. 896); 5) *Al-'Utbiya* of Muhammad al-'Utbī (d. 869); 6) *Al-Majmū'ah* of Muhammad b. Ibrāhīm b. 'Abdūs (d. 873); 7) *Al-Mawwāziyyah* of Muhammad b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Mawwāz al-Iskandarī (d. 882); and 8) *Al-Mabsūtah/Al-Mabsūt* of Qādī Ismā'īl b. Ishāq al-Baghdādī (d. 895).

Of all the primary sources, the most significant of them are two: 1) the *Muwatta'* of Mālik, and 2) *Al-Mudawwanah al-Kubrā* of Sahnūn. Since a school is conceived of primarily as a representation of the opinions of the school's eponym, these two works were identified as those which most soundly archive those opinions. The *Muwatta'* is not merely a collection of prophetic traditions (hadiths). It also houses several of Malik's personal legal views. That notwithstanding, the fact that there were numerous versions of the *Muwatta'* made it a challenge to ascertain which version was officially authorized by its author.

Sahnūn's *Al-Mudawwanah* incorporated the efforts of two of Mālik's students, Asad b. al-Furāt (d. 828) and 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. al-Qāsim (d. 806), along with his own rare insights. Asad compiled the first work archiving Malik's jurisprudence, but that would soon be overshadowed by the reconciliatory work of Sahnūn. Asad may have been the pioneer in this area, but the source of most of his knowledge was 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. al-Qāsim who sat at Mālik's feet for 20 years. Asad's speculative orientation towards jurisprudence had a major influence on the style of his work, a thing that Mālikīs generally found to be tasteless. Consequently, they abandoned his work. Asad also refused Sahnūn's request for a copy of his *Asadiyyah*, so Sahnūn turned to 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. al-Qāsim himself. Unlike Asad, Sahnūn purged the work of 'Abd Al-Raḥmān's quotes expressing uncertainty about the views held by Mālik and appended each chapter with select prophetic traditions to restore the distinct Mālikī character to the project. Considering all the effort exerted by Sahnūn to unite the works of Asad, 'Abd Al-Raḥmān, and other students of Malik, the *Mudawwanah* was often referred to as *Al-Mukhtilatah* (The Blend), even though some writers list *Al-Mukhtalitah* as an independent primary source. It is the same book.

As for the secondary sources, there are many. But the most famous and most studied are three books: 1) *Al-Risālah* of 'Abd Allah b. Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (d. 996); 2) *Mukhtaṣar Khalīl* of Khalīl b. Ishaq (c. 1365); and 3) *Al-Murshid Al-Mu'īn 'alā al-Darūrī min 'Ulūm al-Dīn* of 'Abd Al-Wāḥid b. 'Āshir (d. 1631). Of all the Mālikī works, scholars have expended the most energy on elucidating the chapters of these three texts. In one sense, these three works represent three levels of graduated study. The *Al-Murshid Al-Mu'īn* is a didactic poem which covers natural theology, ritual, and virtue ethics. It is generally viewed as a primer to the three topics. Ibn Abī Zayd's *Risālah* is more advanced than the *Al-Murshid Al-Mu'īn* and contains a great many more chapters of jurisprudence even though it begins with a short section on Sunni dogma. Khalīl's *Mukhtaṣar*, however, is held in the highest esteem despite its often-cryptic nature. The *Mukhtaṣar* focuses purely on Mālikī jurisprudence and is comprehensive in nature. One who masters the contents of Khalīl's *Mukhtaṣar* is usually viewed as ready for issuing fatwas in the Mālikī School.

Other popular works include: *Al-Muqaddimah Al-'Ashmāwiyyah* of 'Abd Al-Bāri al-'Ashmāwī (d. 1185); *Jāmi' al-Ummahāt* of Ibn Hājib (d. 1246); *Irshād al-Sālik ilā Ashraf al-Masālik 'alā Madhhab al-Imam Mālik* by 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. 'Askar al-Baghdādī (d. 1332); *Al-Muqaddimah Al-'Izziyyah li* *al-Jamā'ah al-Azhariyyah* by 'Ali b. Muhammad Al-Misrī (d. 1533); *Muqaddimah al-'Amrūsī* of Ali b. Khidr al-'Amrūsī (d. 1760); *Aqrab al-Masālik ilā Madhhab al-Imam Mālik* of Ahmad al-Dardīr (d. 1787); and *Majmū' al-Amīr* by Muhammad al-Amīr (d. 1817). Practically all these works have attending commentaries and supercommentaries.

Unique Features of the School

Like the jurists of other Sunni legal schools, Mālikis generally agree that there are four primary sources of Islamic jurisprudence: the Qur'ān, the Prophetic Tradition (*Sunnah*), Scholarly Consensus (*Ijmā'*), and Legal Analogy (*Qiyās*). The uniqueness of a given school can be determined by how particular jurists navigate apparent contradictions between primary sources or by the disputed sources they employ in their legal deliberations. Unlike others, the Mālikī School accepts all primary and disputed sources of jurisprudence beyond the four listed above. Of distinction is the place that Mālikis afford the Medinite Customs (*'Amal Ahl al-Madīnah*) as well as their consideration of Public Interest (*Maslahah Mursalah*).

Medinite Customs are the diffuse religious practices of the major scholars of Medina passed down from the first and second generations of Muslims. Early Mālikī jurists considered these customs to be a form of binding consensus (Ijma'). Others argued that the said customs constituted one of two authoritative ways of knowing the Prophet Muhammad's behavioral norms (Sunnah). Moreover, Medinite customs were deemed by early Medinite scholars to be a more authoritative source of the Sunna than the oral traditions known as hadiths. This idea ran contrary to the view of other schools. And when Medinite practices conflicted with undiffused reports (āhād), Medinite customs were preferred. Examples of this include Malik's allowance for Friday fasts; omitting "In the name of God, The Kind, The Compassionate" (basmalah) prior to reciting chapters of the Qur'ān in prayer; and concluding canonical prayers with a single salutation (taslīm). Medinite customs were also deemed to be authoritative in omissions. For example, Medinite scholars did not practice collective supplications and readings of the Qur'an nor litanies in congregation. This made early Malikis disapprove of these customs considering there being no Medinite precedent.

In approximately the 10th century in Andalus, the theory of *Amal* or Medinite customs evolved from its original accommodation of only the customs originating from the first two generations of Medinite inhabitants, into a new concept. This new concept was called *Mā Jarā bihi al-'Amal* or, literally, 'What has run according to custom.' *Mā Jarā bihi al-'Amal* can be defined as a judge's employment of a weak legal opinion and the consequent appropriation of it by other judges and muftis, due a widely-acknowledged public interest. Accordingly, the local governments would temporarily amend the standard laws in specific areas considering changes in popular customs. The enforcement of normative legal customs preferred in the Mālikī School due to the strength of their evidence or popularity were suspended until the ideal circumstances once again returned. In light of this, there arose in Andalus and the Maghrib acts termed the *'Amal* ordinances such as: The *'Amal* of Cordova, of Talamanca, of Fez, of Marrakech, and of Rabat. But, unlike the wide acceptance of Medinite customs among Malikis, the *'Amal* Ordinances were rejected as baseless by many of them.

Modern Day Practice

As already stated, the Mālikī School spread throughout Africa, Iberia, and parts of the Middle East. But the most stable centers of Mālikism were and remain to be found in North and West Africa. Even though modern Muslim countries have adopted eclectic legal codes which often model themselves after former European colonial powers, most of the people living in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Gambia, Ghana, and Libya follow the Mālikī School. The Mālikī School is also the official legal school of Kuwait. That notwithstanding, the most prominent Mālikī country is the country of Morocco, whose ritual and personal status laws are almost exclusively influenced by Mālikī jurisprudence, while the role of Islamic law in the sectors of economics, politics, and the penal code, is unremarkable.

Morocco has many great luminaries who have had significant influence on Mālikī legal culture and other important areas of Islamic thought in and outside of the kingdom. They include scholars and thinkers like: 'Abd Al-Hayy al-Kittānī (1884-1962), the famous early 20th century hadith master; the Ghumārī brothers, Ahmad (1902-1961), 'Abd Allah (1910-1993), and 'Abd Al-'Azīz (1920-1997), well-known for their service to the prophetic tradition; Muhammad b. Ma'juz, official national commentator on the Moroccan personal status law code; Ahmad Al-Raysūnī who has had significant influence in the realm of Islamic legal philosophy. Similar are scholars like the late mufti of Fes and legal theorist Muhammad al-Ta'wīl (1934-2015), and Muhammad al-Rūgī, current president of Al-Qarawiyin University.

Muhammad al-Tāhir Ibn 'Āshūr (1879-1973) is, perhaps, one of the most influential Mālikī scholars of the 20th century. Other influential contemporary Mālikīs include: Al-Sādiq 'Abd Al-Raḥmān Al-Ghiryānī, mufti of the interim national assembly of Libya; Al-Habīb b. Tāhir of Tunisia; Muhammad Al-'Arabī Al-Qarawī of Algeria; Muhammad 'Alawī al-Mālikī of Saudi Arabia (1944-2004); 'Uthmān b. Hasanayn al-Ju'lī of Sudan; Ahmad

Al-Mukhtār Al-Shinqītī and Abdullah b. Mahfūz b. Bayyah, both from Mauritania, along with countless others.

With the spread of Islam in Europe and North America, a significant number of converts have adopted the Mālikī School as well as others. Though the Mālikī School cannot boast of as many followers as the Hanafi and Shāfi'ī schools in the West, a remarkable number of Muslim academics and commoners cling tenaciously to its particulars and take guidance and inspiration from its broad universals. Amongst the most prominent Mālikī scholars and academics in the West are: Umar Faruq Abdullah, Hamza Yusuf (Zaytuna College), Sherman Jackson (USC), Khalid Yahya Blankinship (Temple University), and Timothy Winters (Cambridge University, UK).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ābādī, Muhammad Sharaf bin Amīr al-'Aẓīm, *'Awn Al-Ma'būd 'alā Sunan Abī Dāwūd* ('Amman: Bayt al-Afkār al-Dawliyyah, no date)

Abu Zahra, Muhammad. *The Four Imams: Their Lives, Works and their Schools of Thought*. London: Dar al-Taqwa Ltd, 2000

Adow, Mohammed, "Nigeria's Skin Whitening Obsession: Nigeria has the world's highest percentage of women using skin lightening agents in the quest for "beauty.", *Al-Jazeera* (April 2013)" http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/04/201345148459079 84.html (accessed June 15, 2016).

Al-'Adawī, 'Ali al-Sa'īdī, *Ḥāshiyah al-'Adawī 'alā sharḥ Abī al-Hasan* (Casablanca: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1998)

Al-Ābī, Ṣāliḥ 'Abd Al-Samī', *Jawāhir al-Iklīl Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar al-'Allāmah al-Shaykh Khalīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997)

Al-Andalusī, Abū al-Walīd Ibn Rushd, *Bidāya al-Mujtahid wa Nihāya al-Muqtaṣid* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997)

Al-Albānī, Muhammad Nāsir al-Dīn, *Silsilah al-Ahādīth al-Da'īfah wa al-Mawdū'ah wa Atharuha al-Sayyi' fī al-Ummah* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma'ārif, 1992)

Al-Aṣbahānī, Ahmad b. 'Abd Allah Abū Nu'aym, *Kitāb Tarīk Aṣbahān: Dhikr Akhbār Aṣbahān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1990)

Al-'Asqalānī, Ahmad b. Ali b. Hajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995)

Al-Baghdādī, 'Abd Al-Wahhāb b. Ali b. Naṣr, *'Uyūn al-Majālis* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Rushd, 2000)

Al-Balādhurī, Ahmad b. Yahyā, *Kitāb Jumal min Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, edited by Maktab al-Buhūth wa Dirāsāt (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1996)

Al-Dasūqī, Muhammad ‘Arafah, *Ḥāshiyah al-Dasūqī ‘alā al-Sharḥ al-Kabīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1905)

Al-Dhahabī, Muhammad b. Ahmad b. ‘Uthmān, *Siyar al-A ‘lām al-Nubalā’* (Beirut: Mu’assasah al-Risālah, 1981)

Al-Dimashqī, Ismā ‘īl b. Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Aẓīm* (Beirut: Mu’assassah al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 1996)

Al-Fayrūzābādī, Muhammad b. Ya ‘qūb, *Al-Qāmūs Al-Muḥīṭ* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995)

Al-Fayyūmī, Ahmad, *Al-Misbāh Al-Munīr* (Beirut: Al-Maktabah Al-‘Aṣriyyah, 1997)

Al-Ḥanafī, Al-Mullā Ali Al-Qārī Al-Harawī, *Sharḥ al-Shifā’ li al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-’Ilmiyyah, 2001)

Al-Jazarī, Ali b. Muhammad, *Usd al-Ghābah fī Ma ‘rifah al-Saḥābah* (Lebanon: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2012)

Al-Jawziyyah, Muhammad b. Abī Bakr b. Ayyūb b. Qayyim, *Al-Manār Al-Munīf fī al-Ṣaḥīḥ wa al-Ḍa ‘īf* (Mecca: Dār ‘Ālam al-Fawā’id)

Al-Jawziyyah, Muhammad b. Bakr b. Qayyim, *Akhbār al-Nisā’* (Beirut: Dār Maktabah al-Hayāh, 1986)

Al-Jīdī, ‘Umar b. ‘Abd Al-Karīm. *Al-‘Urf wa Al-‘Amal fī Al-Madhhab Al-Mālikī wa Mafhūmuhumā ladā ‘Ulamā’ al-Maghrib*. Muhammadiyyah, Morocco: Joint Publication of Kingdom of Morocco & United Arab Emirates, 1984

Al-Ju ‘lī, ‘Uthmān b. Ḥusayn Barrī, *Sirāj al-Sālik Sharḥ Ashal al-Masālik li Naẓm Targhīb al-Murīd al-Sālik ‘alā Madhhab al-Imām Mālik ibn Anas* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-’Ilmiyyah, 2001)

Al-Karamī, Mar ‘ī b. Yusuf, *Masbūk al-Dhahab fī Faḍl al-‘Arab ‘alā al-‘Ajam wa Sharaf al-‘Ilm ‘alā Sharaf al-Nasab* (Jordan: Dār ‘Ammār, 1988)

Al-Mas ‘ūdī. Ali b. al-Husayn b. Ali, *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma’ādin al-Jawhar*, ‘Abd Al-Hamid edition (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1973)

Al-Miṣrī, Muhammad b. Mukrim b. Manẓūr al-Ifrīqī, *Lisān al-‘Arab* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1882)

Al-Mukhtār, Al-Shinqīṭī, Ahmad b. Ahmad, *Mawāhib al-Jalīl min Adillah Khalīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-’Ilmiyyah, 2005)

Al-Nahwī, Ya’īsh b. Ali, *Sharh al-Mufassal* (Egypt: Idārah al-Tibā’ah al-Muniriyyah, *no date*)

Al-Nawwawī, Yahyā b. Sharaf. *Sharh Ṣahīḥ Muslim* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995)

Al-Nawwawī, Yahyā b. Sharaf. *Rawdah al-Tālibīn wa 'Umdah al-Muttaqīn* (Beirut: Al-Maktab Al-Islāmī, 1991)

Al-Nawwawī, Yahyā b. Sharaf. *Al-Taqrīb wa al-Taysīr li Ma'rifah Sunan al-Bashīr al-Nadhīr*, Beirut: Dār al-Malāh, (no date),

Al-Qurṭubī, Abū 'Umar Yūsuf b. 'Abd Allāh b. Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Barr, *Al-Kāfi fī Fiqh Ahl al-Madīna al-Māliki* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1992)

Al-Qurṭubī, Muhammad b. Ahmad, *Al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān wa al-Mubayyin limā taḍammanahu min al-Sunnah wa Āy al-Furqān* (Beirut: Mu'assassa al-Risala, 2006)

Al-Qushayrī, Abū al-Qāsim 'Abd Al-Karīm, *Al-Risālah Al-Qushayriyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2005)

Al-Rāzī, Abū Hātim Ahmad b. Hamdān, *Kitāb al-Zīnah fī al-Kalimāt al-Islāmiyyah al-'Arabiyyah*, Hamadani edition (Sana: Markaz al-Dirāsāt wa al-Buhūth al-Yamanī, 1994)

Al-Rāzī, Muhammad b. Abī Bakr al-Rāzī. *Mukhtār al- Ṣiḥāḥ*. Beirut: Maktabah Lubnān, 1986.

Al-Rūgī, Muhammad. *Qawā'id al-Fiqh al-Islāmī min Khilāl Kitāb al-Ishrāf 'alā Masā'il al-Khilāf li al-Qādī 'Abd Al-Wahhāb al-Baghdādī al-Mālikī*. Damascus & Jeddah: Dār al-Qalam & Dār al-Bashīr, 1998

Al-Rūgī, Muhammad. *Nazariyyah al-Taq'īd al-Fiqhī wa Atharuhā fī Ikhtilāf al-Fuqahā'*. Rabat: Muhammad V University, 1994

Al-Rundī, Ibn 'Abbād, *Ghayth al-Mawāhib al-'Aliyyah fī Sharh al-Ḥikam al-'Atā'iyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah)

Al-Sakhāwī, Muhammad b. 'Abd Al-Raḥmān, *Al-Maqāṣid Al-Ḥasanah fī Bayān Kathīr min Al-Ahādīth Al-Mushtahirah 'alā Al-Alsinah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1979)

Al-Ṣāwī, Aḥmad b. Muhammad, *Kitāb Sharḥ al-Ṣāwī 'alā Jawharah al-Tawḥīd* (Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2009)

Al-Shinqītī, Ahmad b. Ahmad. *Mawāhib Al-Jalīl min Adillah Khalīl*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2005

Al-Shubrakhītī, Ibrāhīm b. Mar'ī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Wahabiyyah bi sharḥi arba'īna hadīthan al-Nawwawiyah* (Egypt: Sharikah Maktabah wa Maṭba'ah Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Awlāduhu bi Miṣr, 1955)

Al-Suyūṭī, 'Abd Al-Raḥmān, *Raf' Sha'n al-Ḥubshān* (Cairo: Mu'allif, 1991)

Al- Ṣuyūṭī, ‘Abd Al-Raḥmān, *Tadrīb al-Rāwī Sharḥ Taqrīb al-Al-Nawwawī* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1993)

Al-Suyūṭī, ‘Abd Al-Raḥmān, *Tārīkh al-Khulafā’* (Cairo: Dār al-Fajr li al-Turāth, 2004)

Al-Ṭabarī, Muhammad b. Jarīr, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī min Kitābihi min Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āyi al-Qur’ān*, Ma‘ruf and Hirstani edition (Beirut: Mu’assassah al-Risālah, 1994)

Al-Ṭabarī, Muhammad b. Jarīr, *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī: Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, Muhammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrahim edition (Egypt: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, *no date*)

Al-Tanūkhī, Saḥnūn b. Sa‘īd, *Al-Mudawwanah Al-Kubrā* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1998)

Al-Tha‘ālibī, ‘Abd Al-Malik b. Muhammad, *Fiqh al-Lughah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1994)

Al-Tirmidhī, Muhammad b. ‘Īsā, *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī: Al-Jāmi‘ Al-Mukhtaṣar min al-Sunan ‘an Rasūl Allāh wa Ma‘rifah al-Ṣaḥīḥ wa al-Ma‘lūl wa mā ‘alayhi al-‘Amal* (Damascus: Dār al-Fayḥā, 1999)

Al-Yahṣubī, Qāḍī ‘Iyaḍ, *Al-Shifā bi Ta‘rīf Ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2000)

Al-Yahṣubī, ‘Iyāḍ b. Mūsā. *Tartīb al-Madārik wa Taqrīb al-Masālik li Ma‘rifat A‘lām Madhhab Mālik*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1998

Al-Zamakhsharī, Mahmūd b. ‘Umar, *Asās al-Balāghah*, Muhammad Basil edition (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1998)

Al-Zuhrī, Muhammad b. Sa‘d, *Tabaqāt Ibn Sa‘d*, Dr. ‘Ali ‘Umar edition (Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānijī, 2001)

Al-‘Umarī, ‘Abd Al-‘Azīz Ibrāhīm, *Al-Wilāyah ‘alā al-Buldān fī ‘Asr al-Khulafā’ al-Rāshidīn* (Riyadh: Dār Ishbīliyyah, 2001)

Armstrong, Karen, "The Myth of Religious Violence", The Guardian (September 2014), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/25/-sp-karen-armstrong-religious-violence-myth-secular (accessed on June 15, 2016).

Asante, Molefi K., *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change* (Chicago: African American Images, 2003)

Bendyshe, Thomas, *Anthropological Treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach* (London: Anthropological Society, 1865)

Bin Bayyah, ‘Abd Allah b. Mahfūz. *Sinā‘ah al-Fatwā wa Fiqh al-Aqalliyāt*. Jeddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 2007

Blumenbach, Johann Friedrich, *The Anthropological Treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach*, "On the Natural Varieties of Mankind" (London: The Anthropological Society, 1865)

Brown, Jonathan A.C. *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World.* Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2011

Chalabi, Hamdi 'Abd Al-Mun'im. *Dalīl al-Sālik li al-Mustalahāt wa al-Asmā' fi Fiqh al-Imām Mālik.* Riyadh: Maktabah al-Sā'ī, 1990

Conniff, Michael L., *Africans in the Americas: A History of the Black Diaspora* (Caldwell, New Jersey: The Blackburn Press, 1994)

Cruse, Harold, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (New York: The New York Review of Books, 1997)

Darwin, Charles, *The Origin of Species* (New York – London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975)

Darwin, Charles, *Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1872)

Elbashir, Ahmed E., *The United States, Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Nile Valley* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983)

Esposito, John. *The Oxford History of Islam.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999

Garner, Steve, *Racisms: An Introduction* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2010)

GhaneaBassiri, Kambiz, *A History of Islam in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

Gobineau, Arthur, *The Inequality of Human Races*, edited by Adrian Collins (New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1915)

Goldenberg, David M., *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (London and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003)

Harun, 'Abd Al-Salām Muhammad, *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ* "Fakhr al-Sūdān 'alā al-Biḍān" (Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānijī, 1964)

Hodgson, William B., Notes on Northern Africa: The Sahara and Sudan (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1844)

Ibn Al-'Arabī', Qāḍī Abū Bakr Muhammad, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1988)

Ibn al-Athīr, 'Ali b. Muhammad. *Usd al-Ghābah fi Ma'rifah al-Sahābah.* Beirut: Dār Ibn Hazm, 2012

Ibn al-Jawzī, 'Abd Al-Raḥmān, *Tanwīr al-Ghabash fī Faḍl al-Sūdān wa al-Ḥabash*, edited by Marzūq Ali Ibrāhīm, (Riyadh: Dār al-Sharīf, 1998)

Ibn al-Jawzī, 'Abd Al-Raḥmān b. Ali, *Kitāb al-Mawḍū'āt* (Medina: Al-Maktabah Al-Salafiyyah, 1966)

Ibn al-Qassār, Ali b. 'Umar. *Al-Muqaddimah fī al-Usūl*. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1996

Ibn 'Āshūr, Muhammad al-Tāhir. *Treatise on Maqāsid al-Sharī'ah*. London & Washington: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2006

Ibn Hajar, Ahmad b. Ali. *Kitāb Tadhhīb al-Tahdhīb*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995

Ibn Hajar, Ahmad b. Ali. *Nuzhah al-Nazar Sharh Nukhbah al-Fikr*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, (no date)

Ibn Hishām, 'Abd Al-Malik, *Al-Sīrah Al-Nabawiyyah* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Ma'ārif, 2004)

Ibn Khaldun, 'Abd Al-Raḥmān, *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldun* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1993)

Ibn Khaldun, Abd Al-Raḥmān, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History, The Classic Islamic History of the World*. Trans. Frantz Rozenthal, edited by Bruce Lawrence (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005

Ibn Sa'd, Muhammad, *Kitāb al-Tabaqāt al-Kubrā* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānijī, 2001)

Ibn Taymiyyah, Ahmad b. 'Abd Al-Halīm, *Iqtiḍā al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm li Mukālafah Aṣḥāb al-Jaḥīm* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Rushd)

Jackson, John G., *Introduction to African Civilizations* (New York: Citadel Press, 1994)

Jacobson, Matthew Frye, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1998)

Lane-Poole, Stanley, *The Story of the Moors in Spain* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1990)

Lewis, Bernard, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990)

Levtzion, Nehemia and Powels, Randall L., *The History of Islam in Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000)

Makhlūf, Muhammad b. Muhammad. *Shajarat al-Nūr al-Zakiyyah fī Tabaqāt al-Mālikiyyah*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2003

Montagu, Ashley, *The Concept of Race in the Light of Genetics* (London: The Free Press of Glencoe Collier-Macmillan, 1964)

Nehemia Levtzion & Randall L. Pouwels. *The History of Islam in Africa.* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000

Segal, Ronald, Islam's Black Slaves: The Other Black Diaspora (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001)

Shuqayr, Na'ūm, *Tārīkh al-Sūdān* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1981)

Smedley, Audrey, *Race in North America: Origen and Evolution of a World View* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1993)

Smedley, Audrey, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a World View* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2012)

Sulayh, Ahmad. "Al-Mudawwanah Al-Kubrā wa Atharuhā fī Turuq al-Tarjīh fī al-Madhhab al-Mālikī." *Majallah al-Madhhab al-Mālikī* Volume 1. Issue 2006: pp. 7-34. Print.

Temple University, *Modern Traditions: The Student for Intellectual Heritage 052*, edited by James L. Marra and Stephen C. Zelnick (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1996)

Thurman, Howard, *The Luminous Darkness.* (Richmond, Indiana: Friends United Press: 1989)

Toledano, Ehud R., *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East* (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1998)

Toynbee, Arnold J., *A Study of History: Abridgment of Volumes I-VI by D.C. Somervell* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974)

Unknown Author, *Ḥudūd al-*'Ālam *min al-Sharq ilā al-Gharb*, edited by Yūsuf al-Hādi (Cairo: Al-Dār Al-Thaqāfiyyah li al-Nashr, 1999)

Ware III, Rudoph T., *The Walking Qur'ān: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014)

William, Chancellor, *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1987)

World Health Organization, "Preventing Disease Through Healthy Environments: Mercury in Skin Lightening Products", (2011), http://www.who.int/ipcs/assessment/public_health/mercury_flyer.pdf (accessed June 15, 2016).

INDEX

A

Abbās b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, 68
Abbāsid clans, 68
Abbāsī, 67, 68
Abode of Emigration, 179
Abraham's two son, 153
    Isaac, 44, 45, 153
    Ishmael, 9, 44, 45, 55, 69, 151, 153
Abyssinian Slave, 60, 82, 93, 117, 119, 120
Abū Bakrah (father of the Morning), 120, 121
Abū Dharr, 93, 94, 113
Abū Juḥayfah, 53, 54, 171
Abū Nu'aym, 63, 82, 83, 86, 185
Abū Ḥudhayfah, 93, 119
Adam, 4, 37, 42, 74, 91, 93, 99, 129, 131, 142, 159, 164
Adamic/pre-Noachian phenomenon, 131
Aesthetic bias, 10
Aesthetic sensibilities, 95
African American, 22, 31, 35, 135, 152, 188
African Empires, 18
Africans groups, 28, 109
African slaves, 106, 107, 117, 118, 122, 142
Afro-Arabian, 4, 111, 167
Ahl al-Bayt, 146, 147
Ahmad b. Abī Sulaymān, 75
Ahmad b. Ahmad al-Shinqīṭī, 16
Al-Aswad (the black one), 46, 93, 96, 97, 121
Al-Ṣādiq, Imam Jaʿfar, 126

Al-Albānī, Muhammad Nāṣir al-Dīn, 185
Al-Asfahānī, Rāghib, 146, 157
Al-Ashram, Abraha, 118
Al-Aʿlām al-Nubalā, 48, 55, 186
Al-Bashshār, Muhammad, 73
Al-Bayhaqi, 54, 86, 169, 170, 171
Al-Bazzār, Abū Bakr, 107
Al-Dardīr, Ahmad, 49, 182
Al-Dardīr's, Muhammad, 75
Al-Dhahabī, Hāfiz, 48, 54, 55
Al-Fayrūzābādī, Muhammad, 27, 48, 74, 149, 186
Al-Fayyūmī, 27, 77, 109, 186, 6, 45, 58, 63, 88-90, 99-101, 110, 111, 134, 162, 189
Al-Karamī, Marʿī b. Yūsuf, 44, 45
Al-Karamī, Marʿī, 186
Al-Khattāb, Umar b., 16, 119, 167, 180
Al-Masʿūdī, 12, 13, 19, 29, 57, 81, 110, 132, 134, 135, 162, 186
Al-Misbāh Al-Munīr, 27, 77, 109, 186
Al-Mudawwanah, 70, 72, 180, 181, 188, 191
Al-Mufaṣṣal, 149, 186
Al-Mughīrah al-Makhzūmī, Abū Hudhayfah b., 119
Al-Mukhtār al-Shinqīṭī, Aḥmad b. Aḥmad, 65, 72
Al-Muktaf, 174
Al-Musayyab, Saʿīd b, 51, 171, 179
Al-Qurṭubī, 16, 17, 65, 71, 75, 91, 103, 149, 187
Al-Qārī, Mullā Ali, 54, 83, 186
Al-Rashid, 114, 173, 174, 188
Al-Ruqāshī, Yazīd, 170
Al-Rāzī, Abū Ḥātim, 187
Al-Sakhāwī, 6, 63, 82-88, 121, 164, 187
Al-Shinqītī, Ahmad, 16, 186, 187
Al-Shubrakhītī, 64, 74, 102, 187
Al-Shāfiʿī, Muhammad b. Idris, 86
Al-Siddiq, Abu Bakr, 82, 119, 179
Al-Suyūṭī, Imam 22, 40, 50, 51, 82, 84, 88, 99, 107, 108, 109, 113, 114, 120, 132, 173, 174, 175, 187, 188
Al-Thawri, Sufyan, 60
Al-Tirmidhi's Jāmi, 54
Al-Tirmidhī, Abū ʿĪsā, 107, 114, 131
Al-Wāthiq, 173-175
Al-Zamakhsharī, 149, 188
Al-Ḥasan, Ali Abū, 68

Al-Ḥaṭṭāb, 72
Al-Ḥusayn al-Mas ʿūdī, Ali b., 13, 29, 57
Al-Ḥākim, 46, 175
Al-Ṣāwī, 22, 64, 102, 103, 111, 112, 114, 115, 187
Al-Ṭabarānī, 83-85, 171
Al-Ṭayālisī, 169
Al-Tirmidhī, Abū ʿĪsā, 107, 114, 131
al-Ṭufayl, Abū, 171
Al-ʿAdawī, Ali al-Ṣa ʿīdī, 69, 70
Al-ʿIrāqī, Zayn al-Dīn, 148
Al-ʿĀlam, Ḥudūd, 13, 26, 28, 29, 56, 57, 109, 191
Al-ʿĀs, Amr b., 111, 114
Alarming appearance, 101, 110
Albino-like discoloration (see vitiligo), 48
Ali b. Abī Ṭālib, 53, 68
Ali, Dr. Abdullah, vii
Alā al-Bīḍān, Fakhr al-Sūdān, 99, 100, 101, 110, 189
American Civil War, 125
American Revolution, 119
Anachronistic, 26, 42
Andalus, 32, 103, 178, 183
Anglo-Saxon races, 20, 137, 141, 142, 145
Animalistic aspect, 160
Anthropology, 14, 139
Anti-black policy, 3
Anti-black sentiment, xi, 3, 18, 36, 37, 39, 57, 104
Anti-whiteism, 139
Antipathy, ix, 4, 9, 26, 32, 37, 63, 64, 81, 90, 99, 100, 111, 139, 145, 166
Anushirvan, king, 118
Apocryphal traditions, 33, 115
Apostasy, 49, 52, 58
Apostle of God, 112
Arab ethno-cultural, 51
Arab Muslim consciousness, i, iii, ix, 4, 5, 26
Arab Muslims, 34, 35, 79, 106, 110
Arabia, xii, 9, 26, 37, 40, 45, 59, 66, 79-81, 90, 100, 102, 115, 117-120, 184
Arabian Peninsula, 34, 39, 41, 155
Arabian society; black African, 9, 50, 102, 117
    Freemen, 9
    Merchants, 9, 11, 13, 29, 56

    Slaves, 9, 11, 22, 23, 29, 30, 35, 37, 64, 78, 80, 83, 85, 86, 87, 93, 94, 103, 106, 107, 111, 112, 114, 117-126, 142, 191
Arabic language, 34, 41, 42, 44, 50, 61, 97, 104, 149, 152, 155, 156
Arabism, 34
Archetypal stocks, 130
Black, ix-191
white, xi-190
yellow, 17, 21, 30, 58, 130, 132, 134, 137, 140
Aryan blood, 17, 18, 42, 150
Asad b. al-Furāt, 181
Asante, Dr. Molefi, 152
Ash'arī doctrine, 112
Aswad, 46, 49, 75, 76, 93, 96, 97, 121
Asās al-Balāghah, 149, 188
Autochthones, 15
Avicenna, 162
Axumite slaves, 118
Axumite-Arabian, 110
Ayman, Umm, 85, 114, 118, 120
Azd, 99
Āmir, Uqbah b., 111
‘Abd Al-Muṭṭalib, 68, 100, 101
‘Abd Al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī, 50, 60, 63, 75, 83, 101, 109, 118-121, 127
‘Abd Al-Raḥmān b. al-Qāsim, 64, 180, 181
‘Abd Al-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldun, 10-12, 19, 26
‘Abd Al-Wahhāb al-Baghdādī, 66, 187
‘Abd Allah b. Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī, 68, 181
‘Abd Allāh b. Ahmad, 171
‘Abdul-Rahman, Ibrahima, 78
‘Adnānī and Qaḥṭānī stocks, 9
‘Adnānī branch, 45, 55, 69, 98
‘Alawīs/Alawids, 68
‘Āishah, 54, 85, 148, 171
"Arabian Blacks" and "Black Arabians, 41

B

Backward, African group, 28, 109
Bad omens, 10
Bakr, Abu, 51, 68, 82, 107, 113, 119, 153, 157, 179, 180, 189

Balādhurī, 119, 185
Bamba, Amadu, 115, 167
Bantu-speaking cannibals, 26
    Tanzania, 18, 26, 77
    Zanzibar, 18, 26, 66, 77, 81
Banū al-Mughīrah, 85
Banū al-'Abbās, 148
Banū Hilāl, 180
Banū Hāshim, 68
Banū Jurham, 9, 45
Baras, 16, 48, 76
Battles, 92, 157
    Badr, 119, 157, 167, 174
    Uhud, 157
Berling, Judith, vii
Best-ness, 153, 158
Bias, 10, 26, 32-36, 65, 77, 81, 87 see also cultural biases, 32, 33, 81
biblical framework, 130
Bilal b. Rabah, 76, 82, 113, 119, 165
Bin Sayyid, Umar, 78
Biological fact, 61, 80, 98, 155, 166
Black Africans, ix, 34, 36, 37, 55, 60, 66, 80, 88, 94, 103, 118, 123, 124, 130
Black antipathy, 32, 37, 63, 64, 90, 99, 100, 111, 139, 166
Black crow, 91, 114
Black face, 39
Black hue (ḥilyah sawdā), 48, 55
"Blackness", 10, 36, 50, 52, 60, 62, 64, 66, 73, 76, 92, 93, 99, 102, 103, 121
"blacks", 10, 14, 18, 21, 27, 40, 56, 57, 58, 64, 66, 75-77, 80, 81, 87, 95, 100, 106, 135, 163
Blasphemous, 70
Blinkered opinions, 16
Blood relative, 65
blood requital, 151
Blumenbach, Johann Friedrich, 189
Bright-skinned caliph, 50
Bygone Arabs, 80
Byzantine, 43, 118, 120

C

Caliph in Islamic history, 179
  Al-Khattāb, Umar b., 16, 119, 167, 180
  Al-Siddique, Abū Bakr, 179
  Uthmān, 48, 55, 73, 121, 126, 127, 167, 179, 183, 186
Caliphs of the Abbasid dynasty, 40
"cannibalism", 11
Caribbean Islands, 79
Carnal lusts, 85
Catholicism, 141
Charitableness, 85
Chattel slavery, 37, 112, 122
'Caucasian', 14, 130
Chauvinism, 90, 99, 149, 151
Children of Israel, 134, 153, 156
Christian west, 37
Citizenship, 3, 20, 22, 125, 135, 141, 142
Civilization, 11, 13, 14, 17-19, 26-29, 34-37, 42, 56, 57, 79, 81, 96, 101, 108, 111, 115, 123, 129, 137, 150, 166, 190, 191
Clergymen, 26
Coca Cola, 139
Cognitive dissonance, 162
Collins, Adrian, 17-19, 29, 42, 129, 130, 189
Colonizing faiths, 152
  Christianity, 30, 32, 62, 79, 80, 106, 118, 139, 141, 152, 164, 189
  Islam, ix, 12, 25, 30, 35, 37, 45, 46, 49, 51, 62, 66, 76-83, 87, 88, 90, 91, 103, 104, 113, 114, 115, 117, 123, 124, 125, 135, 139, 145, 149, 151, 152, 156, 157, 179, 184, 189-191
Color-based chauvinism, 90
Color-based race classification, 36
Colorism, 90, 136
Color-based, meaning of the word, ix, 36, 37, 57, 61, 90, 108, 136, 137
Colors among the Arabs, 55
Black (umdah), ix-191
Brown (sumrah), 47, 89, 165
Colors among the non-Arabs, 47, 89
  Red (humrah), 47
  White (bayad), 47, 89
Concept of, ix, 18, 27, 37, 62, 135, 136, 147, 162, 164, 165, 191
Concubinage, 51, 122
Connecticut mosque, 3

Consanguine, 153
Coptic population, 66
Craniometry, 14
Critical race theory, 4, 135 see CRT 135
    Antiracism, 4
Diversity, 4, 5, 30, 42, 77, 82, 140, 149
Equity, 4
Inclusion, 4, 30, 43, 62, 91, 94, 95, 99, 103, 120, 130, 136, 155
Intersectionality, 4
White fragility, 4
Cross-acculturation, 45
Cultural biases, 81
Cultural hermeneutic, 73
"Curse of Ham", 21, 107, 109, 111, 134

D

Daniyyah, 32, 65, 67, 70, 71, 73, 88, 103 see ignoble, 10, 32, 65-74, 88, 103
Dark brown (âdam), 52, 89
Darwin, Charles, 189
Definition of, 27, 56, 71, 97, 109, 135, 140, 153
Dehumanization, 9, 166
devaluation of people, 37
Devout Muslim, 67
Dhī Yazan, Sayf b., 118
DiAngelo, Robin, 4
Disbelief (see kufr), 75
Discrimination, 30, 31, 95, 96, 139
Disdain for Blacks, 81, 92
Dispositional determinism, 134
doctrine of Arab superiority, 145
Dravidian people, 39
Dysmorphic, 63, 82, 93
D'Angelo, Robin, 1345

E

Egalitarianism, 30, 37, 103
Egyptian-Azharī sector, 179
Egyptian civilization, 18

ElBashir, Ahmed E., 189
Eliminating the use of the word 'race' from scientific parlance, 165
Enfranchisement, 94, 95, 99, 125, 138
Enlightenment Era, 43
    Caucasian, 14, 15, 35, 43, 109, 130, 138, 140, 141, 163
    Malayan, 43, 140
    Mongolian, 43, 139, 140
Ethiopians, 46, 63, 78, 108, 110
Ethnic differences, 141
Ethnic identity, 31, 37, 44
Ethnocentrism, 31
Etiology, 62, 81
Eurasian stock, 130
Eurocentricism, 34
European colonialism, ix
European Judeo-Christian, 94
Eve, 91
Evolution, theory, 4, 37, 96, 137, 162, 191
Exegetical innovation, 106

F

Face of exclusion, 5
Concept of fadl, 147
    Genus, 55, 61, 80, 136, 146
    Non-humans, 146
    Species, 5, 28, 32, 40-43, 49, 58, 61, 80, 88, 89, 100, 103, 130, 131, 136, 140, 146, 148, 161, 162, 165, 189
Fair-skinned people, 39
    Caucasoids, 39
    Mongoloids, 39
Family of Muhammad, 146
Farewell Pilgrimage, 124
Fatimah, Prophet Muhammad's daughter, 146-148
Free white person, 20
Friday sermon, 46, 147
Frivolity, 12
Fugitive black slave, 87

G

Gabriel (angel), 51, 52
Galen, 12, 19, 110
Gandhi, Mahatma, 30, 90
Genitals, 60, 83, 85
Genotypic distinction, 20
Ghana, 11, 18, 29, 183
Gobineau, Arthur de, 14, 17, 97, 137, 145, 163
God-conscious, 145, 154
Gog and Magog, 107, 132
Goldenberg, David, 189
Graduate Theological Union, vi, vii
Group identity, 61
Guiding Questions, xi, 34
Guizot, Francois, 18
Gushed forth, 133

H

Ḥabībah, wife of Thābit's, 92
Hadith, 6, 44, 46-54, 60, 63, 65, 71, 76, 82-90, 93, 97, 98, 102, 104, 107, 111, 113, 114, 120, 124, 125, 131, 132, 146, 152, 154, 164, 169, 170, 171, 177, 179, 182, 183, 187, 189
    Al-Bukhari, 52-54, 114, 152, 169, 171
    Muslim, i-187
Hager, mother of Ishmael, 9
Haiti, 21
Ham, 106, 107, 108, 129, 132
Hajj, 90
Hamid Ali, Abdullah bin, iii, vi
Hamitic peoples of Africa, 39
Hanbali jurists, 63
Harakah al-taswiyyah, 149
Ḥārithah, Zayd b., 93, 114, 119
Ḥasan Barrī, Uthmān b., 167
Hava, J. G., 26, 74
Hedonistic, 63
Heirs of the Prophets, 33, 167
Herodotus, 75, 108, 109
Heterosexual Christians, 4

Hiernaux, Jean, 165
Hishām, Abd Al-Malik b., 44, 45, 52
Hind b. Abī Hālah, 170
Hocus-pocus, 15
Homer, 75, 108, 109
Homo sapiens, 129, 161
Horn of Africa, 26, 66, 81
Household chores, 67
Ḥudūd al-'Ālam, 13, 26, 28, 29, 56, 57, 109, 191 see Limits of the World, 13, 26, 28, 29, 56, 110
Human beings, definition, 27, 37, 56, 71, 94, 95, 97, 109, 111, 135, 140, 142, 153, 166
Human equilibrium, 13, 28, 56 see ḥadd i'tidāl al-bashar, 13, 28, 56
Human language, 150
  Arabic, 5, 6, 13, 26, 29, 34, 36, 41, 42, 44, 46, 48, 50, 61, 74, 81, 97, 102, 104, 106, 112, 136, 146, 149, 150, 152, 155, 156, 159
  Hebrew, 141, 150
  Persian, 30, 32, 34, 43, 44, 46-48, 50, 51, 54, 55, 57, 89, 94, 100, 102, 107, 108, 117, 118, 132, 148-150, 173
  Syriac, 106, 150
Human species, 5, 130, 131
Hurayrah, Abu, 53, 171, 179
Huxley, Thomas Henry, 15
Hybridity, 115
"Hybridization", 18

I

Ibn 'Abbās, 54, 74, 85, 170
Ibn Abī Zayd, 68, 69, 180, 181
Ibn 'Abd Al-Barr, 70, 71, 180
Ibn al-Qāsim, 70, 180
Ibn Al- Athīr, 47, 92, 189
Ibn al-Jawzī, 22, 63, 75, 83, 85, 93, 99, 109, 111, 114, 119, 121, 135, 190
Ibn 'Arafah, 72
Ibn Fāris, 149
Ibn Fatūḥ, 72
Ibn Hajar Al-Al-'Asqalani, 54
Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, 148
Ibn Hishām, 9, 45, 52, 69, 190
Ibn Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī, 118, 134

Ibn Khaldun, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 18, 19, 26, 29, 34, 51, 62, 81, 94, 111, 135, 151, 152, 162, 163, 190
Ibn Manẓūr, 47, 48, 89, 164
Ibn Qutaybah, 148
Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah, 63, 83
Ibn Sa'd, 108, 124, 132, 188, 190
Ibn Taymiyyah, 41, 44, 46, 49, 147, 148, 190
Ibrāhīm b. Mar'ī al-Shubrakhītī, 64, 74, 102
Idolatrous man, 60
Ifriqiyā, 26, 77
    Algeria, 26, 34, 77, 183
    Libya, 26, 34, 77, 183
    Tunis, 77
Ignoble woman, 68, 70, 71, 73, 88
Ikhshīd dynasty, 120
Ikhwah (blood brothers), 153
Immigration and Nationality Act, 20
Imperfection (see vitiligo), 10, 73, 76
Imperialism, (see also cultural imperialism), 14, 99
Imperialistic ideology, 18
    Forced religious conversion, 18
    Labor servitude, 18
    Mass murder, 18, 156
    Military conquest, 18
Indian Ocean, 66
Indo-Aryan races, 41
    The Alpine, 41
    The Mediterranean, 11, 41, 57, 163
    The Nordic, 41
Indoctrination process, 20
Industriousness, 163
Intellectual elite, 22
Islam, ix, 12, 25, 30, 35, 37, 45, 46, 49, 51, 62, 66, 76-83, 87, 88, 90, 91, 103, 104, 113-115, 117, 123-125, 135, 139, 145, 146, 149, 151, 152, 156, 157, 179, 184, 189-191, *see also*
Muslim society, 51
Islamic Emancipation, xii, 122
Islamic jurisprudence, 114, 124, 182
    Legal Analogy (Qiyās), 182
    Scholarly Consensus (Ijmā'), 182
    the Prophetic Tradition (Sunnah), 182
    the Qur'ān, 16, 25, 34, 37, 46, 52, 80, 82, 84, 90, 102, 104, 115, 121, 122, 124, 125, 130, 131, 133, 134, 142, 146, 148, 152-157, 159, 160, 179, 182

Islamic orthodoxy, 80
Islamophobia, 96
Ismā'īl, Ja'far b. Mūsā b., 101
Isḥāq, Khalīl b., 16, 72, 181
Iyāḍ, 76

J

Jackson, John G., 190
Jackson, Sherman, vii, 11, 184
Jacobson, Matthew Frye, 190
Japheth, 61, 94, 107, 108, 130-134, 163
Jawharah al-Tawḥīd, 103, 111, 187
Jaḥsh, Zaynab bt., 93
Ja'far, Abd Allah b., 126
Jewish holocaust, 142, 145
Jim Crow segregation, 138
Jiwa, Dr. Munir, vii
Jordan Valley, 100
Judaism, 32, 62, 106, 118, 139, 189
Judeo-Christian heritage, 107
Judgment Day, 158
Julaybīb, 92
Jurisprudence, 46, 59, 114, 124, 178, 181-183

K

Kaleidoscopic, 21
Kan, Abdul-Qadir, 115, 122, 123, 167
Kathīr, Ibn, 53, 60, 64, 103, 111, 133, 152, 187
Ka'bah, 53, 91, 114
Kendi, Ibram X., 4
Khalaf, Umayyah b., 82
Khalīl b. Isḥāq's, 16
Khaythamah, Ibn Abī, 171
Khosrow I, 118
Khurasan of olden times, 44
Khuyyāt, Sumayyah bt., 119
Kinship (see nasab), 45
Kufa, 48, 60, 173

L

Lack of civilization, 26, 111, 115, 166
Language, 4, 5, 26, 28, 34, 40-44, 46, 50, 61, 62, 74, 77, 78, 97, 101, 104, 109, 113, 135-137, 149-152, 155, 156, 159, 167
language-based racialism, 136
laudable traits, 86
lawfulness of marriage, 67
Leech-like clot, 131
Legal investigation, 3
Levantine Arabs, 136
Lewis, Bernard, 190
Lexicographer, 26, 27, 47, 57, 74, 77, 112, 149, 157, 164
Liberal mind, 10
Light brown, 43, 54, 89, 98, 132, 170 see asmar al-lawn, 53, 54, 169
Lightheadedness, 12
Limlim people, 18
Lincoln's bravery, 125
Lineage, 62, 67, 73, 91, 108, 148, 151, 154
Lingua franca, 46, 152
Linneaus, Carl, 85, 163
Lisān al-'Arab, 47, 48, 89, 186
"Little Mālik", 68
Luqman the wise, 89, 102
Lusts, 85, 100

M

Maghrib, 11, 27, 29, 64, 66, 178, 180, 183, 186
Magnanimity, 47, 65, 66, 101, 110
Magnanimous, 110
Malay stocks, 130, 131
Malevolence, 152
Malcolm X, 30, 31, 90, 99
Male's sperm, 16
Manumit (see mu'taqah), 65, 69-71, 103, 125, 126
Manṣūr, Sa'īd b., 169
Marriage guardianship, 36, 68
Marwān, Abd al-Malik b., 51
Maryland, 106

Masrūḥ, Nufayʻ b., 120
"Master race" doctrine, 145
Mauritania jurist, 65
Mawâhib al-Jalīl, 16, 65, 72, 186, 187
Maymūnah, 180
Mecca, 30, 45, 68, 83, 119, 152, 157, 179, 186
Meccan pantheon, 82, 119
Medieval jurists, 16
Medieval race taxonomies, 43
    Hamites, 28, 43, 130
    Semites, 42, 43, 130
Mediterranean, 11, 40, 41, 43, 57, 97, 98, 109, 141, 163
Mercy to all creation, 83
Mesopotamian origin, 151
Mestizas, 20
Mexico, 20, 140
Middle Passage, 9, 22, 123, 129
Mihyaʻ b. Ṣāliḥ, 119
Millennia, 62, 117, 129
Miraculous journey, 53
Misapprehension (see Wahm), 155, 157, 170
Miscegenation laws, 20, 21
Miseducation of the Negro, 22, 23
Moderate climate, 11
Monogenetic origin, 129, 166
Montague, Ashley, 61, 165
Moore, Richard B., 22
Moral code, 34, 59, 83
Moral corruption, 121
Moses, 52, 53, 76, 134, 153
Mount Caucasus, 15
Muadhdhin, 119
Muhammad, Elijah, 30
Muhammad, Fard, 30
Muhammad, Wallace D., 30
Muhammad b. Ahmad AlQurṭubī, 16
Muhammad b. Ismāʻīl al-Bukhārī, 169
Muhammad the Prophet, 25, 30, 36, 37, 40, 41, 44-46, 49, 51-53, 55, 59, 68, 71, 75, 76, 82, 83, 90, 97, 99, 104, 113, 114, 118, 120-122, 124, 126, 136, 154, 155, 164, 165, 169, 179, 180, 182
Murūj al-Dhahab, 13, 29, 57, 132, 135, 186

Musalmāniyyah, 65, 69
Muslim armed forces, 119
Muslim east, 37
Muslim society, ix, 51
Muslim world, 22, 63, 90, 120
Muwatta, 177, 178, 180, 181
Mālik, Anas b. Imam, 53, 54, 169, 177
Maliki School and Race, xi, 5, 59
Mālikī School of Law, 59, 177
Māriyah, Muhamad concubine, 45
Mūsā, Iyāḍ b, 54, 75, 188

N

Nation of Islam (see NOI), 30
Native Africans, 50
Native American, 20, 96
Native Mexican women, 20
Natural Origins Formula of 1924, 20
Naturalization Acts (1790 & 1965), 20, 135, 142
Nazism, 145
Negative connotations, 10, 28, 97
Negative stereotype, 25, 77, 99
"Negro" use of the term, i, iii, ix, xi, 17, 22, 26-28, 35, 56, 57, 60, 77, 78, 105, 121, 167
Negro blood, 78
Negroid races, 18
Negus of Abyssinia, 110
New Imperialism, 14
New world, 21, 95, 136
Nigerian women, 139
Nile of Egypt, 27
Noachian doctrine, 61
Noah's Ark, 133, 134
Noah's flood, 133
Noah's three sons, 61, 107, 110, 130
    Ham, 106-108, 129, 132
    Japheth, 61, 94, 107, 108, 130-134, 163
    Shem, 61, 94, 107, 108, 130-134, 163
Noble lineage, 67
Abbāsī, 67

- Alawī, 67, 183
- Qurashī, 67, 75, 89, 101
- "noble" and "ignoble" women, 10, 71
- Non-Arabs, 34, 47, 51, 68, 89, 95, 103, 104, 119, 134, 148, 149, 152, 155
  - Kurds, 34
  - Persians, 34, 43, 46-48, 54, 55, 57, 89, 100, 107, 108, 132
  - Turks, 34, 35, 107, 132, 134, 175
- Non-virgin (thayyib), 71
- Normative conception, 41
- North Africa, 15, 21, 50, 59, 109, 111, 137, 180
- Northwestern sector, 26
  - Algeria, 26, 34, 77, 183
  - Libya, 26, 34, 77, 183
  - Tunisia, 10, 26, 34, 183
- Nubian Christians, 66

O

- Oasis of Ammon, 17, 18
- One-drop rule, 20, 21
- Otherness, 31
- Ottomans, 122
- Oxford English Dictionary, 27

P

- Pan Africanism and Pan-Africanists, 35, 97, 98, 101, 145
- Paradise, vii, 46, 63, 89, 114, 157, 158
- Patriarch, 44, 129, 157
- Patrons, 124
- Pedigree, 45, 50, 65, 68, 73, 94, 146, 151, 163 see nasab, 45, 65, 73, 163
- Peninsula, 9, 34, 39, 41, 118, 155, 165
- People of Abyssinia, 13, 29, 56, 57
- People of Nubian, 50
- People of the Hejaz, 48
- Perceiving Black, xi, 36, 79
- Persian, 30, 32, 34, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48, 50, 51, 54, 55, 57, 89, 94, 100, 102, 107, 108, 117, 118, 132, 148-150, 173
- Phenotypic differences, 61
  - Color, ix-191

  - Hair texture, 61, 135, 161, 166
  - Shape of the nose and lips, 61
- Physical traits, 95
- Pith of a palm tree, 55, 171 see jummārah, 55, 171
- Pledges, 157
  - Aqabah, 158
  - Ridwān, 158
- Political pundits, 4
- Politicization, 156
- polygenetic theory, 129
- Poverty-prone, 63
- Pre & Post Enlightenment, xii, 37, 129
- Precious stones, 12
  - Gold, 12, 13, 28, 56, 148
  - Silver, 12, 54, 171
- Prejudice, 4, 26, 31, 37, 42-44, 61, 88, 96
- Premodern experience of, 62
- prisoners of war (POWs), 117, 121
- Progenitor, 108, 130, 131
- Progressive, African group, 28
  - Hamites, 28, 43, 130
  - Kushites, 28
  - Moors, 28, 78, 190
- Prolegomena, 10 see Al- Muqaddimah, 10, 19, 181, 190
- Prophets, 33, 46, 52, 103, 156, 167
- Prophetic era, 30, 31, 37, 80, 108, 117
  - Abdullah the jew, 30
  - Bilal the Ethiopian, 30
  - Salman the Persian, 30, 102, 148
  - Suhayb the Greek, 30, 102, 148
- Protestantism, 141
- Protonegroid belt, 39
- Pseudo-science, 14
  - Craniometry, 14
- Psycho-emotional state, 62
- Pudgy nose, 114, 120

Q

- Qādī 'Iyāḍ, 53, 54, 75, 76, 186, 188
- Qahtānī Arabs, 100

Qaḥṭān, Ya'rub b., 45
Quasi-Blacks, 90
Qunbulah, 110, 111
The Quran, 145
Qurashī, 67, 75, 89, 101, 111
Quraysh tribe, 37, 102, 146
Qur'ānic verses, 16

R

Rabble rousers, 52
Rabāh, Bilal b., 76, 82, 113, 119, 165
Race & Slavery, 43, 106
Race determination, 40
Race taxonomies, xii, 37, 43, 61, 98, 140, 159
Racial anatomy, 20
Racial anthropology (see scientific racism), 14
Racial bifurcation, 4
Racial difference, 5, 40, 42, 50
Racial Integrity Act(1924), 20, 96, 135
Racism, xi, xii, 4, 14, 15, 20, 31, 36, 37, 64, 80, 90, 94-96, 135, 138, 139, 142, 145, 164, 189
Raids of villages, 117
Redness, 54, 74, 96, 102, 169-171
Relationship by marriage, 45 see sihr, 45
Religious community, 25
Resilience, 5
Risālah, 32, 68, 69, 91, 134, 148, 149, 167, 181, 186-188

S

Sages, 25, 112, 167
Sahara Desert, 66
Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 25, 47, 53, 89, 92, 96, 97, 113, 114, 124, 125, 146, 154, 187
Saḥnūn, 70, 180, 181, 188
Saintly personalities, 32
Sayf b. Dhī Yazan, 118
Scholarly, argument, iv, 3, 32, 33, 59, 66, 156, 164, 182
"scientific racism", 14
Sectors of Maliki school, 178

  Egypt, 22, 44, 45, 66, 69, 70, 103, 111, 120, 175, 178
  Iraq, 20, 34, 44, 50, 60, 63, 64, 99, 122, 148, 151, 155, 175, 178, 180
  Maghrib, 11, 27, 29, 64, 66, 178, 180, 183, 186
  Medina, 64, 69, 70, 89, 101, 114, 126, 177-180, 182, 190
Secularism, 141
Seen simply, as a biological fact, 98
Segregation, 95, 138
Self-identification, 42, 165
Sexual appetite, 88
Sexual gratification, 51
Shanū'ah tribe, 53
Sharaf al-Al-Naw wawī, Yaḥyā b., 46, 89, 92, 93, 96
Sharīfah (see noble), 65, 67-69, 71
Sharī'ah, Law, 59, 83, 157, 190
Shaykh, vii, 33, 72, 185 see spiritual master, 32, 33
Shuqayr, Na'ūm, 191
Shuubism, 149
Skin tone, 22, 64, 95, 170
Skin color, 10, 31, 35, 50, 52, 54, 55, 62-64, 76, 92, 96, 102, 104, 107, 112, 131, 136, 161-163, 166
skin whitening creams, 139
slave owners, 80, 122-126
Slavehood, xi, 94, 105, 106, 114
Slavs Saqalibah, 11
Smedley, Audrey, 191
Social alienation, 103, 162
Social privilege, 96, 140, 146
Socio- historical realities, 25
Sociocultural, 37, 146, 147, 149
Somatic norms, 10
Species, 5, 28, 32, 42, 43, 58, 61, 80, 88, 89, 100, 103, 130, 131, 136, 140, 146, 148, 161, 162, 189
Sprites, 47, 89, 111 see jinn, 47, 89, 111
Staples; made of, 12
  Corn, 12
  Herbage, 12
Stereotyping, 167
Stewardship, 142, 161
Sub-Saharan Bantu-speaking, ix
Subhuman status, 22
Sudan, 34, 41, 47, 49, 66, 73, 89, 108, 122, 165, 183, 189

Sufis, 32, 102
Sultan of Muscat, 39
Sumayah bt, Khuyyat, 119
Sun-heated water, 16
Sunni aggrandizement, 146
Sunni tradition, 59
Hanafi School, 59
Hanbalī School, 59, 61
Māliki School, xi, 3-5, 10, 32, 36, 59, 60, 62, 64, 65-68, 88, 103, 166, 177-179, 181-184
Shāfi'ī School, 59, 86, 184
Synonyms, use of, 27, 28
Systemic racism, 138

T

Tabaqāt, 108, 124, 132, 188, 190
Takrūr, 11, 18, 29
Tanwīr al-Ghabash, 50, 63, 75, 109, 114, 118-121, 127, 190
Taxonomies, of race, ix, xii, 9, 14, 35, 37, 43, 61, 77, 98, 135, 140, 159
Taymiyyah, Taqī al-Dīn Ibn, 41
Tha'lab, of Kufa, 46, 48
Thābit b. Qays b. Shammās, 92
Theology, 25, 29, 36, 181
Thomas, Dr. Bertram, 39, 43
Thurman, Dr. Howard, 30
Tirmidhī, Imam, 54, 99, 107, 114, 131, 154, 164, 169, 188
Toynbee, Arnold J., 191
Trade relations, 13, 57
Tradition, religious, 3, 18, 25, 30, 32-34, 62, 77, 115, 123, 130, 141, 152, 164, 167, 179, 182, 188
Transhistorical Anti-Black Sentiment, xi, 36, 39
Transatlantic slave trade, 26, 27, 31, 35, 40, 122
Tribe of Quraysh, 68, 147
Tribes of Israel, 45
Tripartite division, 101, 110
Tripartite stock, 130
Trump, Donald, 135
Ṭūlūn, Ahmad b., 120
Tunisian Maliki historian, 10, 29

Turkey, 122
Turkish rule, 122
Tārīkh al-Khulafā, 40, 50, 51, 173, 188

U

Ubayy, Abd Allah b., 92
Ufayrah, 119
Umar I, Caliph, 114
Umar II (see Umayyad caliph), 109
Ummah (see community), 82, 137, 152, 153, 181, 185
Umayyad dynasty, 51
United States, iv, 10, 29, 30, 49, 79, 99, 106, 107, 125, 135, 140, 189
University of Capetown, 94
Untamed animals, 13, 29, 56
Uqbah b. 'Āmir, 111
Urwah b. Al-Zubayr, 179
Usāmah b. Zayd b. Al- Ḥārithah, 119
use of the term, 22, 165
Uthman b. Affān, 121, 126
Uthmān b. Ḥusayn Barrī, 73, 186
US Congress, 20
Uyūn al-Majālis, 66, 67, 102, 185

V

Vehement repudiations, 72
Vicegerency, 37, 159, 160, 161
Vilification, 121
Vindication, 33, 63, 84
Virsginia, 21, 105, 106
Vitiligo, 10, 16, 48, 49 see baras, 16, 48, 76

W

Warrant incrimination, 11
Washington, George, 20
Webster's New World Dictionary, 95
Wehr, Hans, 26, 74

Well-proportioned faces, 13, 57
Western abolitionism, 117
Western nations, 4
Wheat-colored (al-ḥinṭī al-lawn), 48, 55
White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, 141 see WASPs, 141
White complexion (see shuqrah), 47
White fragility, 4
white imbued,54, 169
White population, 40
    Armenian, 40, 174, 175
    Greek, 17, 23, 30, 39, 40, 44, 46, 47, 50, 51, 55, 94, 100, 102, 110, 134, 148, 159
    Turkish, 40, 50, 120, 122, 132, 174,
White society, 135
White supremacy, 135
Whiteness, 10, 15, 20, 21, 42, 47-49, 51, 52, 54, 55, 62, 64, 65, 74, 80, 102, 103, 114, 135, 138, 141, 142, 170, 171, 190
White-skinned (bīḍ), 40, 48, 53, 54, 74, 80
Williams, Chancellor, 36, 79
Woodson, Carter G., 23
World Health Organization, 139, 191
Wrongdoers, 25

X

Xenophobia, 61
Xenophobic nature, 111, 115

Y

Yam, 108, 133
Yāsir, Ammār b., 119
Yaḥyā b. Abī Sulaymān, 85
Ya'qūb b. Isḥāq al-Kindī, 12
Yellow race, 17, 130
Yusuf, the Prophet, 13, 26, 28, 29, 44, 45, 56, 57, 65, 71, 74, 102, 103, 109, 148, 184, 186, 187, 191

Z

Zanj and Zanji peoples, 13, 14, 18, 26-29, 45, 56, 57, 60, 77, 78, 82, 85, 99, 109, 111, 121, 122 *see* Negro i, iii, ix, xi, 17, 22, 26-28, 35, 56, 57, 60, 77, 78, 105, 121, 167
Zanzibar and Tanzania, 18, 26, 77
Zayd b. Harithah, 93, 114, 119
Ziyād, Tāriq b., 178
Ziyādāt, 171
Zābij people, 13, 56
    Half-nude, 13, 56